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by  
**Charles Dye**







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Hands of Time  
The Little White  
Cloud That Cried  
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Anytime  
Jadwiga  
Shirley Beale  
Ms. My Life's

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 No More  
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 from Memphis  
 Baby, We're Really in  
 Love  
 I Wanna Play House  
 With You  
 Hey, Good Lookin'  
 Alabama Schlimm



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Cryin' Heart Blues  
Cold, Cold Heart  
Somebody's Been  
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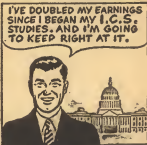
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Robert W.  
Lowndes,  
Editor

Volume 3

July, 1952

Number 2

★ ★ *Feature Novel* ★ ★

**BECAUSE OF THE STARS** ..... Charles Dye 12

The stars mean more than life itself to Captain Grey, and because of them — to continue his career among them — he agrees to steal a certain chart. Only thus can his secret be kept safe for the short period still necessary. But one simple theft turns out to be far from simple, leading to an involved and deadly intrigue among a small party, whose objective remains in mystery. One thing is no mystery — the stake is high enough for one of the party to try to wipe out all the rest, including Grey!



*Novelet*

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Dark are the shadows over Atlan, as Prince Teraf seeks the meeting-place of a revolutionary group . . .

*Short Stories and Departments*

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Your editor talks a little, but for the most part, here is where he listens to your opinions, favorable or otherwise.

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The first women on the Moon have to pay a heavy price . . .

**THE SECOND SHIP** ..... Jerome Bixby 81

Danny doesn't understand, yet, why he's such an important person.

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A vignette of tomorrow.

**THE RECKONING** ..... 93

A report on how you rated our March issue.

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If you haven't the time, or inclination, to write a letter or postcard, why not fill this out? We won't lose it.

*Cover by A. Leslie Ross, from "Unreasonable Facsimile"*

*Interior Illustrations by Lueros and Murphy*

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## Down To Earth

### TODAY AND TOMORROW

WHILE one of the prime objectives of "scientists" is agreement (not, as we have noted before, a matter of personalities, but of results) no such goal is necessary amongst science-fictionists, be they readers, fans, writers, editors, or publishers. Science requires standardization, pretty much throughout; early experimenters (many of them alchemists) made a number of important discoveries—and displayed such admirable individuality in noting them, that no one else could determine just what they had done to get their results. On the other hand, fiction wants a minimum of standardization; general agreement on structure, and the difference between story and narrative, report, incident, episode, etc.; the usages of language (sufficient attention to grammar so that the reader can tell who did what to whom, etc.), and a bare-essential agreement as to differentiations between a detective, western, sports, love, and science-fiction story, etc., are about all we need. Push it much farther than that, and the authors don't write stories; they just fill in blanks.

So, even though I agree with H. L.

Gold that the keynote of science-fiction lies along the lines of *speculation*, rather than *prophecy* (as others, notably Hugo Gernsback, have maintained) I'm not under the illusion of having at last found the "truth" of the matter, nor do I feel that everyone else should agree.

You'll find many interesting "basic theories" relating to almost any art-form, and some will seem "right" to you. In some cases, those who came forward with the "right" theory didn't seem to be able to do much of importance with it, while "great" practitioners in the field displayed the strangest, and most obviously "wrong" ideas on the subject.

It doesn't matter. Richard Wagner had his own ideas on how the opera should be handled, invented what he called "music drama", and took a lot of time off from writing notes to write words, "proving" that his way was not only the best but the only way; that everyone before him was suffering from sorry misconceptions, and that—now that he had put it right—no one thereafter could possibly produce any meaningful work without employing his basic approach. I'm told that all this reads interestingly enough, and that many were convinced by it; but

[Turn To Page 8]



**SENSATIONAL RESULTS REPORTED IN CURBING**

# PIMPLES

**BLACKHEADS, ACNE AND OTHER EXTERNALLY CAUSED SKIN BLEMISHES**

**CLINICAL TESTS SHOW  
100% SUCCESS**

Actual clinical tests of 100 acne patients, with a new twin-action method and formula—show that the acne or pimples were decidedly improved or completely arrested in every single case tested!

Recently, a leading medical journal published the results of exhaustive tests on the treatment of acne. 100 young men and women patients—suffering from acne condition of their skin—were carefully selected from four leading hospitals and clinics. All the patients were questioned and advised on personal hygiene, dietary, cosmetic and postural habits, and other aggravating factors.

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one needs look no farther than Verdi's "Otello" to find that it was quite possible, after Wagner had revealed the "truth" to compose a viable opera which showed no signs of agreement with Richard I whatever.

Nope. It works the other way around; in an art-form, you look at—or listen to—the results first; if the production is a masterpiece, or just plain good, then the producer's theory was right—for him. If someone else picked up the theory, all of it, or just snippets which attracted him, and also came forth with noteworthy works, then the first man contributed something with his theory, too. But this still doesn't make anyone who pays no attention an idiot, for whose productions there can be no hope.

IN ITS early days, when magazine science-fiction first got under way through the foresight of Mr. Gernsback, there were very definite standards: a science-fiction story, first of all, must have sound "science", and should impart scientific information to the reader. A very fine theory, if the object of science-fiction is pedantry, and a number of good stories were produced under this standard; more were sorry specimens of fiction, however valuable the sugar-coated pills might have been as information. And, in addition, once the lecture was finished, sad messes of nonsense often followed, so that the reader, who lacked the scientific foundation necessary to know better, often swallowed the nonsense along with the pedantry. Take Dr. Keller's well-known novel, "The Human Termites"; it was based on Maeterlinck's "Life of the White Ant", and you'll get a good deal of sound doctrine on the termite through reading that story. The story itself is still fascinating. But, along with all this, you get such nonsense as twenty-foot-high insects—without any explanation as to *how* such a critter (if it came about at all) could live more than a few minutes. In fact, the question wasn't raised at all, so far as I

recall. (The question includes design and the insect's air-supply, among other problems. The termite's present design, and its present breathing-apparatus is very fine—for a creature that size; expand the critter to a twenty-foot height, *without* altering its design, and it couldn't stand up, let alone breathe.

Later, Orlin Tremaine popped up with a different theory for science-fiction; stories should have reasonably-correct science, but the prime element was a *new* scientific idea—a "thought variant." It's a nice theory for science-fiction, no doubt, but there's a flaw in it so far as actual practice is concerned; few writers are specialists in any particular scientific field, and few specialists can write good fiction. The result was some fascinating ideas, often coupled with clumsy story; and some fascinating stories with expansively pretentious nonsense for the "new" scientific thoughts. Take Van Kampen's famous yarn, "The Irrelevant", for example. The author claimed that he'd broken the "law" of conservation of energy and gotten away with it; arguments raged back and forth in the letter column for months thereafter. It was a clever story, an interesting idea, and a very neat bit of semantic trickery. Actually, Van Kampen *did* point out something which may be important; we may find, once we get out into space, that certain *aspects* of the "law of conservation of energy" are, indeed, irrelevant in this different framework. But if the "law" is a "law of nature" to begin with, then we'll also find that it still applies—in different ways.

Magazine science-fiction came of age, however, when the various editors, such as John W. Campbell, Jr., fell back upon the obvious basic theory—namely that science-fiction was, first of all, *fiction* and story-value most important; which means, primarily, interesting and credible characters—and, in order to make them

[Turn To Page 10]



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this chance to make  
the man of your  
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Authentic Perfumes in  
each glass vial! Enough  
for 20 nights "On The  
Town."





so, the characters must have believable motivations and show traits which we know to be "true" of human behaviour. (There's one side-branch of the form, which allows for tours-de-force not found in many other types of fiction; characters can be non-human or altered-human, in either case exhibiting different traits and motivations. In these stories, verisimilitude is the essential; their action and attitudes, etc., must be consistent with their particular natures, as given by the author.)

This approach has been more fruitful than any other, and the test has been simply this: could a person who has never seen science-fiction before, read and enjoy any given science-fiction story, as a story? The expansion of the field has answered the question with a resounding "Yes!"; and the increase in complaints from fans, as well as readers, on characterization in particular stories—rather than quibbles over the "science" or the "idea"—shows that science-fiction has taken root.

Personally, I like it this way—and I suspect that it'll remain thus for quite some time to come.

## Letters

### IDEA OF THE YEAR

Dear Bob:

I was busily writing a letter to the editor of *Science Fiction Quarterly*, and making off-hand suggestions for improving that magazine, when I was struck by a really good idea.

Here it is, all yours, postage prepaid, and ripe for the plucking: A series of stories by the various science-fiction authors who are noted for their "future" stories, as well as newcomers (or old hands) who come up with good, consistent future-history backgrounds for stories—probably novelet-length, though you might be able to get novels, too. (Anything shorter, I think, would fail to sketch in an adequate background.)

Such a series, besides being good reading, should be of real value to those of us

who think seriously, from time to time, about the society in which we live and what-are-things-coming-to. My idea is not for a far-future series; perhaps you should limit the time to the next 200-250 years.

Rules could be very flexible, but should limit the authors not only in time, but in general approach. That is, the stories should show a fairly-logical extrapolation from present-time; no "everything changed entirely after the God-creatures of Alpha Centauri arrived". If any such creatures *do* arrive in this series, I should think the story would have to be about *how* things changed...who was affected first? Who held out?

*This* would be a book, eventually, with a ready-made title from the magazine, and well worth reading!

And don't ever tell me I don't give my best ideas away. This one is a lulu! But your title is made to order for it...

Judith Merrill

(It's a fine idea, Judy, and can make a humdinger of a long-term project. I'd like to collect suggestions from you readers, and various authors interested, before plunging in. Should we try to work them out in order, for example? And how far should authors 2, 3, etc., be bound by the scene set by author 1, etc.?)

### JACKPOT

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I want to tell you how pleased I was with the March issue of *Future*; for once I purchased a magazine and enjoyed every story in it. Usually, most magazines have one strong lead novel, or several good shorts, and let the rest ride on their coat-tails.

Your departments are all interesting, but, best of all, you don't overwhelm anyone with ten or twelve of them. However, *must* you have two, shall we say, comments, on each story? Most people who read science-fiction are able to form their own.

I am not going to ask for better paper, cut edges, or less enthusiasm (?) on the cover, but could you possibly see your way to having *Future* better bound, I would be forever grateful. My magazines receive no rough handling, yet they come apart, and I lose half the stories.

Personally, I thought that the inside illus-  
[Turn To Page 86]





# Do Unseen Powers Direct Our Lives?

ARE the tales of strange human powers false? Can the mysterious feats performed by the mystics of the Orient be explained away as only illusions? Is there an intangible bond with the universe beyond which draws mankind on? Does a mighty Cosmic Intelligence from the reaches of space ebb and flow through the deep recesses of the mind, forming a river of wisdom which can carry men and women to the heights of personal achievement?

## Have You Had These Experiences?

..... that unmistakable feeling that you have taken the wrong course of action, that you have violated some inner, unexpressed, better judgment. The sudden realization that the silent whisperings of self are cautioning you to keep your own counsel—not to speak words on the tip of your tongue in the presence of another. That something which pushes you forward when you hesitate, or restrains you when you are apt to make a wrong move.

These urges are the subtle influence which when understood and directed has made thousands of men and women masters of their lives. There IS a source of intelligence within you as natural as your senses of sight and hearing, and

more dependable, which you are NOT using now! Challenge this statement! Dare the Rosicrucians to reveal the functions of this Cosmic mind and its great possibilities to you.

## Let This Free Book Explain

Take this infinite power into your partnership. You can use it in a rational and practical way without interference with your religious beliefs or personal affairs. The Rosicrucians, a worldwide philosophical movement, invite you to use the coupon below, now, today, and obtain a free copy of the fascinating book, "The Mastery of Life," which explains further.

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Scribe E.C.H. .

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I am sincerely interested in knowing more about this unseen, vital power which can be used in acquiring the fullness and happiness of life. Please send me, without cost, the book, "The Mastery of Life," which tells how to receive this information.

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(The Rosicrucians are NOT a religious organization.)





Wrigley had a double-barreled shotgun; Velia had a pearl-handled .22, and Deventhall an air-rifle. Grey wondered what it was they could be hunting.



# BECAUSE OF THE STARS

Feature Novel of Spaceways Intrigue

By Charles Dye

**"Except for this slight deception you've practised over the years, your record has been A-1, Captain Grey. But if the facts come out now, you're through; you have to be covered until the end of this year. I can see to it that you will be covered until deception is no longer necessary; in return, you will do a favor for me." Because of the stars, the stars which were his life to Grey, he couldn't refuse this offer; and the "little favor" led to theft and a race with murder and madness!**



**"CAPTAIN GREY!"** called a deep, booming voice. "May I have a word with you before you leave the ship?"

Grey turned and stepped back through the airlock of the *Willy Ley*, wondering why all passengers hadn't disembarked by this time. Inside the companionway, he stopped and stared at the man who had called his name—a big, beefy man, with the heavy red face of an old-time politician. Above the face was a thick mane of snow-white, Santa Claus hair. "Jolly old mountebank" would have described the man's appearance if it hadn't been

for his all-too-deadly, baby-blue eyes.

Grey tried to hide the impatience in his voice. "Yes? I'm in a hurry, so I can't—"

The man cut him off with a wave of his hand. "Yes, yes, Captain; I, too, am in a hurry. But first we must discuss your option, which is coming up for review next month."

"What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't. But since you ask...er...Storch. Paul Storch. Yes, that'll do."

"Not your real name, of course?" The impatience in Grey's voice was no longer hidden.

"Of course." The man smiled, displaying a beautiful set of teeth—which hadn't grown in his mouth.

"Well— What about my option?" Storch chuckled and cocked his head. "Mr. Reeves, your...ah..."



sponsor, dropped dead several days ago—in fact, shortly before we blasted off for the Moon. And in going over your dossier...well, I now know where you hid the body, so to speak."

Grey felt a shock of apprehension. *So now they know—after all these years. And poor old Reeves...dead.* "All right," he said. "Let's go up to the control nest where we can talk."

His hands trembled as he unlocked the *No Admittance* gate leading to the nest stairwell.

Storch, still puffing from the climb, let himself down heavily into one of the pneumatic chairs facing the control console. Too nervous to sit, Grey leaned back against a bank of firing keys and tried to calm his pounding heart.

Finally Storch got his wind and said, "Now, Grey, I hope I haven't gotten you too perturbed. I'll try to make this as short as possible by not explaining my background or my connection with Trans-Lunar Spaceways. When I'm finished you'll see why my credentials, or who I am, is not important. But first, in a nutshell, let me give you our respective situations—

"All right, then, here is your situation: Three years out of astroga-tion school, and three years after Reeves sponsored you to your first contract with Trans-Lunar, your left eye developed astigmatism. Fortunately you caught it in time and had it corrected with a contact lens. However, this still wouldn't get you past the monthly Option Review Board, with its ruling against anything but natural 20/20 vision. So you went to Reeves, knowing he was the only board member who ever saw your dossier, and explained your plight. And, old family friend that he was or whatnot, he decided to cover up for you—which, actually, was very easy for him—since all he had to do was to

ignore the Trans-Lunar medical reports. But in order to acknowledge receipt of each report, he had to enter them into the recording mechanism of your dossier. In glancing through your dossier, along with several others Reeves had charge of, I happened to find out about you."

GREY HADN'T realized he had been holding his breath until he heard it hiss out between his clenched teeth. "All right, Storch; now what? I assume from your conversation that, for some reason, you haven't told anybody else in or out of Trans-Lunar about this."

"Why should I be a snake, Grey? I'm not what they call a 'company man.' Except for this...slight deception you've practiced over the years, your record has been A-1, more than satisfactory. And, I might add, your name has come up for consideration as commander of the *Relativity*, when that ship makes its initial run to Proxima Centauri next year. Also, I have it on good authority that Trans-Lunar intends to relax the ruling against artificial visual aids, providing this year is completed without any spacial mishaps."

Some of Grey's apprehension gave way to a mixture of relief and puzzlement. "So why tell me all this? Not that I don't appreciate the tip-off; but how am I going to get my dossier past the board, now that Reeves is...?"

Storch smiled and settled his heavy bulk more comfortably into the control chair. "Now we come to my situation: A certain man here on the Moon—over on Darkside—has a paper, a chart that I badly want. This man doesn't know he has it—rather, he doesn't realize what it is. I need someone to get that chart; in fact, I've been pondering the matter all the way out from Earth. Then I overheard someone mention the name of this ship's captain, and I remembered your dossier. So you see, Grey, your



entering into things is all a last-minute improvisation."

Grey couldn't keep the contempt out of his voice. "In other words, nice honest old-fashioned blackmail!"

Storch's baby-blue eyes glittered slightly. "Look at it from the other side, Grey; let us say that you're doing me a favor so that in turn I'll do you a favor."



"Why don't you steal the chart yourself, or get somebody already here on the Moon to do it for you? Why pick on me?"

"Firstly, who is there here I could ask? The nuclear research crowd—a lot of scientists and technicians? Hardly; besides, I have no favors that I could grant them in return. Secondly, this man with the chart doesn't know I'm here, and I can't risk his finding out in case I bungled the job on the first try. Also, as you can see, I'm not the active sort—I detest physical violence. Oh, not that there *should* be any of that, but you never can tell; even the best-laid schemes, you know— And thirdly, as I've already mentioned, you, Grey, were a last-minute improvisation. So—there you have it."

Grey stared wearily up through the astrogation dome at the star-splattered Lunar sky. So now his love for those balls of gas had brought him to this—a situation into which he was being forced to play cat-spaw, burglar, thief. But if Storch didn't fix his dossier by the end of the month, he would be out—through for good. He was past thirty; he could never get a job on the freight-lines or geological ships. There would be no more traveling down Paradise Streets, as he had come to think of the spacelanes, ever again for him.

And, if what Storch said were true, there would be no chance at the command of the *Relativity*, the first of the inter-stellar ships, and there would be no Proxima Centauri.

In spite of his thirty-odd years, Grey suddenly felt very old and very tired. Which should he take: the stars or his conscience? He could live with a guilty conscience, but could he live without the stars? The rising lump in his throat gave him his answer.

"All right, Storch; give me the rest of your setup." The calmness of his voice surprised him.

STORCH took out a fat cigar and toyed with it before replying. "The man's name is Wright—Wrigley Wright; he's a rather eccentric geological researcher for Carlton-LeRoy, Mining Engineers. However, that's unimportant. Wrigley's office and specimen storehouse is an old ore-freighter, moored over on Darkside. As he sometimes works pretty late, I advise you not to go over there until after midnight—Earth time, of course; he should be out of there by then. Since all valuable papers and mineral specimens are kept in an impregnable Marlin safe, I suspect the lock on the airlock is still one of those old-fashioned magnet affairs—"

Storch reached into his pocket and tossed a ring of cubes to Grey. "One of those magnetic skeleton keys should open the lock; once you're through the airlock, turn left. At the end of the companionway will be Wrigley's workroom and filing desk. Somewhere on top of the desk, or in the desk, there will be a stack of currently-computed asteroid and planetoid charts for this month. You won't have any difficulty locating the chart I'm looking for, because it will be hand-drawn, instead of automatically-drawn like the others. Also, one edge should be jagged, since it was torn out of the chart section of a personal log-book."

Storch stuck the unlighted cigar in



his mouth and talked around it. "Now—due to some unforeseen difficulty, you may not have success tonight, or even tomorrow night. But that's not too important, just as long as I have the chart before the *Willy Ley* comes out of refitting dock and you retake command."

Grey's heart sank; he had planned on using every minute of the five-day layover to prospect, privately, for ore out in the Asteroid Belt. But if this Wrigley deal grew any more complicated—

Storch had a pen out and was jotting something on a slip of paper. "Here is Wrigley's mooring number—Oh, yes; in case you run afoul of him, watch out. He's dangerous. Don't worry about contacting me; I'll contact you via Operations downstairs, sometime within the next twenty-four hours. If everything is in order, and you have the chart, then you no longer need fear the end of the month. I'll personally see that your dossier is fixed up until the end of the year—when that old 20/20 vision ruling is suspended."

Grey put the slip of paper in his tunic pocket. "I don't suppose there's any sure way I have of trusting you?"

Storch stood up and started for the nest stairwell. "That's right—There isn't!" He chuckled. "But nothing ventured, nothing gained—"

●

IT WAS PAST midnight when Grey awoke in his quarters topside Operations: having drunk himself to sleep with whiskey, he now had a pounding headache. He sent down for a pint of coffee and somehow got showered and into his civilian clothes by the time it arrived. Drinking it slowly, he brought back into focus the events of the past day and evening.

Everything that had happened—All because of an astigmatism in his left eye! And because of the stars...

With a tinge of bitterness, he slipped his contact lens into place and went downstairs to the Moonport Galileo reception-room. The ivory glare of the long two-week Lunar day coming in through the glass walls hurt his eyes; half squinting, he crossed to the jet-capsule tubes with a peculiar gliding step caused by his reduced weight under Moon gravity.

A Darkside capsule was waiting and he got through the airlock just in time. As soon as he was seated, the lock circled shut and there was an accelerating *swoosh*. The capsule shot over to the Mountains of the Moon and up to New Palomar, housing the old 200-inch telescope—there to drop off the other passengers—then down into a shadowy canyon and across the thin twilight belt separating what was currently Dayside from the dark side of the Moon. Up ahead, through the transparent tube, lights from the Nuclear Research Center came abruptly into view; deceleration began and the capsule slowly glided to a stop.

He got out at the Center Station, had the fare punched from his credit card, then walked to an airsuit check-out booth. After putting down a covering deposit, he zipped the transparent suit over his clothing and snapped on the fishbowl helmet.

He stepped out through the station airlock into the cold Lunar night and headed for the Carlton-LeRoy mooring-yard lights. Each step of his insulated shoes kicked up little clouds of bone-colored pumice, that trailed behind him like tenuous plumes of smoke. Above him, arching across the interstellar night, was the Milky Way, pulsing and throbbing light energy through the vast empty spaces between the stars.

At the beginning of the Carlton-LeRoy docks, he started checking mooring numbers until he found one corresponding with the number Storch had given him. He reached through



the complicated flaps of his airsuit and pulled out the ring of skeleton magnet-keys. The fourth key he tried matched the lock-magnet of the battered old freighter and the airlock slowly circled open. Again he reached through his suit flaps for a penlight he had thought to bring with him. He followed the light's beam through the lock and down the port companion-way. At his touch, the door at the end slid open and lights automatically clicked on in Wrigley Wright's office-workroom.

He unlatched the fishbowl and tilted it back from his head. The room looked more like a junk-shop than office; almost every foot of space not containing chart-tables, or laboratory benches, was cluttered with mineral ore specimens, old astrogation graphs and papers, and—*comic-books*.

He made his way through the litter, over to a big, dented filing desk. After clearing away more comic books, he finally located a stack of asteroid-planetoid orbit-charts for the current month. He was just starting to go through the stack, when he heard a sound that made him freeze. For a moment, all he was aware of was the pounding of his heart; then he heard the sound again, the dull metallic scrape of the airlock, this time circling shut—

Someone had just come in.

Quickly he hurried through the rest of the stack. At the very bottom, he spotted Storch's hand-drawn chart with the ragged edge. He yanked it out, folded it twice, then unzipped his airsuit and slipped it down inside his trousers and into his shorts. After jerking up his zipper, he snatched up a handful of comics to throw over the chart stack.

"Ah-ha! Caught you in the peapatch, did I, did I! Filching my comic-books, are you! *Wel-l-l, wel-l-l!*"

Grey dropped the books and slowly turned in the direction of the high pitched voice.



A LITTLE MAN stood in the doorway holding a big, antique .45 automatic. Reflected light glinted off the barrel from a huge monocle screwed into his right eye; below the monocle was a tobacco-stained, walrus mustache. His fishbowl was thrown back, and on his head he had a battered, old-fashioned straw hat. He was wearing a raccoon-skin coat under his airsuit and below this, on his feet, an old pair of tennis shoes.

This, undoubtedly, was the eccentric Wrigley Wright. But there was nothing eccentric about the way he held and pointed the gun. Grey felt sweat start to trickle down from his armpits.

Wrigley walked towards him and began to laugh. "*Ha, ha, ha, heh, heh, heh, heh— Wel-l-l?* Do you have any famous last words to leave posterity before I turn you over to the authorities?" Wrigley caught sight of the uncovered charts. "What's this, what's this? Not after the comics after all? *Wel-l-l!* Now just suppose you strip off that airsuit and let's see who you are and what you're after—"

Grey got out of the suit, all the time conscious of the steady hand pointing the gun at his middle.

"Now, dear boy, let us see what sort of identification you're carrying."

Grey cautiously drew the packet-wallet out of his inside coat pocket, suddenly aware that all of his captain's and ship's papers were in it. He felt sick inside; this could mean the end of everything— At a motion from Wrigley, he tossed the wallet over.

"Came all the way back here for my reading monocle, I did. Now where did I leave it—? *Ah!*" Wrigley grabbed up the new monocle from a



nearby table, screwed it into his left eye, then thumbed through the wallet—always careful to keep his right eye in line with Grey.

"Ho-ho-o-o! A captain! And commander of the *Willy Ley*! And what's this—? An asteroid-prospecting permit from the Solar Authority. Wel-l-l, wel-l-l! Thought you would come and borrow some of our charts, did you? Turn all your pockets inside out!"

Grey did this, various objects dropping out of them to the deck.

"Wel-l-l, *Captain Grey*—caught you just in time, didn't I— Before you could do any harm. All right, now what do you have to say for yourself?"

Grey felt his old weariness return and with it, hopelessness. Damn Storch and his favors! He didn't exactly know what the sentence for burglary was; but it would wash him up with Trans-Lunar, and with more finality than his dossier ever could. No "favors" would pull him out of this—or would they...?

Grey moistened his lips, then cleared his throat. "I don't know exactly what you intend doing with me, but if I can do anything to extricate myself from this bungled...this mess...some favor, perhaps? Anything—"

"No. Sorry; no favors tonight. It's to the t-v for me—and the authorities for you!" The little man moved off across the room towards a television screen.

For the first time, Grey felt real panic; he was steeling himself to do something—just what, he didn't know—when Wrigley Wright suddenly stopped, cocked his head, and gave him a long appraising stare—

"Now see here, Grey, perhaps I am being a bit too hasty; perhaps you *can* do me a favor—yes. Perhaps we can make a deal here. Yes indeed! Sit down, sit down."

GREY CROSSED over to a chair indicated by Wrigley, relief and

hope flooding through him. Still keeping his two glittering, monocled eyes and gun on him, Wrigley dragged up another chair from across the rubble and sat down opposite him.

"So you're another Raffles—an other gentleman crook, are you? Like to do a little burglar on your nights off, do you? Wel-l-l, wel-l-l."

Wrigley unscrewed his reading-monocle, stuck it in the band of his straw hat, and his manner suddenly became less eccentric. "Now, Captain Grey, let's see what you can do for me—" For a moment he stroked his walrus mustache. "There is a girl, a woman...by the name of Velia Ahrms. Sounds like the name of an apartment-house, doesn't it? Ha! ha! ha! Well, never mind; that's unimportant. Velia, if I may use an old-fashioned term, is an adventuress. She likes thrills, excitement, money; and she's very practical at getting all three—which, of course, means she's dangerous!"



Wrigley went back to stroking his mustache. "I just learned recently that this woman has something that was meant for me. She is staying at the *Cloudy Sea*, a hotel overlooking *Mare Nubium*. Now, the object I want should be somewhere in her room—probably wherever she keeps her reading-matter. It's a standard, form-printed ship's log-book. You, no doubt, know the type—the type anyone might have as a souvenir of their first space-flight, or the facsimile-types agencies are always mailing around to sell people on the idea of a flight into space."

Grey nodded, mentally smiling to himself. Here he was again, caught up in the same sort of situation that Storch had trapped him with. There



was nothing he could do now but go ahead and play the whole thing out.

Wrigley leaned forward, a leer on his face. "Now, here is our little deal: You will leave your fingerprints around the office so, if necessary. I can prove to the authorities you were here; also you will leave the skeleton magnetic keys you got in with. Then you will go out to the *Cloudy Sea* and bring me back that—log-book. In the meantime I'll wait right here, holding your wallet and all your identification papers as security. If you don't report back within a reasonable time, I'll turn them, your skeleton magnets, and your fingerprints over to the authorities."

With his free hand, Wrigley reached through his airtuit flaps and into the pocket of his raccoon-skin coat; he drew out a key and threw it over to Grey.

"That is a special electronically-sensitized key I acquired at great expense this evening; it should open any electronic lock made, including those of the *Cloudy Sea*. I don't know her exact room-number, but it's one of the wing rooms—there are only two—at the end of corridor-left as you leave the twentieth-floor lift."

Wrigley glanced down at a monstrous wristwatch. "It's just two—she's a late-riser and a later drinker; if anyplace, she should still be down in the bar. Incidentally, don't take chances just because she may be carrying a load. She can out-drink a kitchen sink. Also, she started life as a t-v actress so don't let her fool you with any acts. Before going up, use the house t-v to make sure she's still out.

"Now, Mr. Grey," Wrigley continued, standing up, "there you have the deal. And when you complete this 'favor,' as you call it, your papers will be returned to you—and I'll even throw in that stack of charts you think so valuable."

At a nod from Wrigley, Grey went

over and picked up his pocket articles and loose money, then zipped on his airtuit.

"The fingerprints, Captain Grey—Don't forget the fingerprints."

Grey removed the suit gloves and fingerprinted various objects indicated by Wrigley. When this was over, and he was turning to go, Wrigley again halted him. "My jetsled is outside; if you like, you can use it to go back to Center Station."

Grey thanked him and started to leave when he was again stopped. "Here's something to while away the time after you're in the tubes." Wright reached over and handed Grey a comic-book.



GREY LEFT Wrigley's jetsled in a parking-igloo outside of Center Station. Inside, he checked back the airtuit and hopped the first capsule back to Galileo.

There, he changed to the *Cloudy Sea* shuttle, then up and out to the twenty-five story circular tower of opaque and transparent glass—the hotel at *Mare Nubium*. Light from the great bone-colored plain below reflected ivory luminescence up the entire height of its tower; overhead, the yellow-orange, flaring orb of sun burned down the hotel's glassy length at one hundred and twenty degrees centigrade.

The jet-shuttle dived down under the tower's base and into an airlock. The hiss of intrushing air stopped, and he stepped through a long tube to an up-escalator.

The lobby was an enclosed oval of amber-tinted glass; the whole room swam in a golden haze of light. He crossed over to the house t-v screens. A smoky-blue carpet felt so soft underfoot that, unconsciously, he lifted his legs higher to keep from sinking.

Being careful to shield the screen from his face, he asked for Miss



Ahrms' room. A faint sound of buzzing drifted through, but the screen remained blank; she was still out. He let the buzzing continue a minute before cutting off.

He got into the automatic lift and stepped out on the twentieth floor. The foyer was decorated in a rich burgundy-red that seemed to pulse under the untinted light streaming in through barrel-shaped end windows. Nervousness crept into him as he walked to the end of the left corridor, where two silver doors faced each other. Which would hers be?

Fitting Wrigley's special key into the lock, he tried the door on the right, cautiously; it swung open—Heavy male snores coming from somewhere within told Grey that this was not the room. Softly, he closed the door, then tried the one across from it; it opened into darkness and silence. He fumbled for the lights, clicked them on and stepped into the room. The door closed behind him.

A picture-window overlooking *Mare Nubium* had a blue filter drawn over it. The light filtering through gave the emerald walls and ceiling of the room a bottomless sea-green depth. Low-slung, airfoam furniture covered the wine-red rug in well-composed arrangements. Several Lunar landscapes dotted the three walls. Through the picture-window, he glimpsed far-off Earth resting on the Moon's horizon, a mottled ball of blue-silver.

Swiftly he crossed the emerald depths and checked the bedroom and bath. Both were empty—and contained no reading matter. Back in the living-room, he went behind a curving desk of silvered oak and started through the drawers.

All were empty, except the top one—which was locked. He pulled out all the lower drawers, then picked up a heavy piece of abstract sculpture from the desk-top. Stooping, he reached into the empty drawer-spaces, smashed out the thin veneer bottom of the top drawer. A shower of articles

clattered down, including the log-book. He snatched it up, opened it out flat, and stuck it down inside his trousers and shorts with Storch's orbit-chart, making sure the bulge wasn't noticeable. The rest of the articles—notes, writing-materials, address books—he left.

He rose up from behind the desk just in time to see the front door swing open—

A woman stood in the doorway.

**FOR AN INSTANT** they both stared at each other in surprise; then Grey was around the desk and lunging for her—

But she already had her bag open. Her right hand pulled out a stungun, stopping him halfway across the room. Quickly she stepped into the room, kicking the door shut behind her, then stared at him.

With sinking heart, Grey realized that this was not his lucky night; the newcomer could be *none other than* Velia Ahrms. He could do nothing but stare back.

Her honey-brown hair was drawn severely back into a tight bun, exposing small, flat ears which gave her a smooth, deadly appearance. Dark half-moon shadows under her eyes accentuated their sea-greenness. A gold-mesh bra over her heavy breasts sparkled faintly through a blue cellophane evening dress. There was a matching G-string around and between her thighs. Grecian sandals of the same gold-mesh were bound tightly around her feet. The nails of her toes and fingers were painted a flaming scarlet, the color of her half-parted lips. And she had arms—long, smoothly-muscle arms, the same shade of honey-brown as her hair.

"Get over against the far wall," she said huskily. There was a slight thickness to her words; she was drunk, but not too drunk.

Grey pivoted, and backed slowly up to the wall. She glided around in front of him and over to the rear of



the desk. She kneeled, still keeping her eyes and stungun on him, and felt among the objects from the smashed drawer. Suddenly she stood up, bringing with her a small red address-note book; this she tucked into the top of her mesh bra. Then she walked around to the desk-front and sat down, crossing her legs.

"Just what were you after?" Her voice was throaty, now, and not quite so thick. Unconsciously her free hand came up and felt the address book. "No, never mind." She swung her crossed leg slightly. "But how did you get in?"

Grey smiled faintly and shrugged. What else could he do?

She stared at him for a long moment, thinking. Then—"I'm going to turn you over to the management in a minute, but perhaps if you tell me how you open these doors..."

Grey shrugged again. "With a key; how else?"

Her green eyes looked dangerous. "Let's see that key!"

He tossed it over. Its odd shape and feel was enough to convince her. She continued swinging her legs. "How'd you like to do a job for me?"

Grey's mind spun slightly. *This is where I came in*, he wanted to say, but instead—"For what?"

"For letting you get away with this."

Trapped again! How much longer could this go on, he wondered? Wouldn't he ever be able to break out of these "wheels within wheels"?

Finally he heard himself say, "All right. I'm listening—"



**S**HE STOPPED swinging her leg and seemed to relax. "A Mr. Rolfe Deventhall arrived yester-

day on the *Willy Ley*. I didn't learn of this until a few minutes ago when I almost bumped into him going up to his room. He's in 23-C. Deventhall is a man I've been trying to locate for several days—thinking he was already here on the Moon. He has a magazine with him—a scientific journal—which I want. And I want you to get it for me."

Grey began to feel that he was caught on a runaway merry-go-round; he slouched against the wall. "You have the key now— Why don't you get it yourself?"

"Why should I when I have you to take that risk?"

"Once I leave this room, what makes you think I'll ever come back?"

"This!" She suddenly reached up to the neckline of her dress and ripped it away from her bosom, then made one long tear down to her thighs. Still using her free hand, she clawed and twisted at one bra-cup until the gold-mesh started to unravel— In a moment her breast was bare; there were darkening red lines where she had scratched herself.

She leaned back and clicked on the desk t-v set. "Don't worry— I'm not calling the management—yet."

Grey was now standing straight up against the wall, stunned by her performance.

She muttered a room number into the screen— Finally a muffled "Yea" came from the other end.

"Harvey—come over to my room a moment." She clicked off and straightened up.

A moment later, there was a knock on the door; she went over and opened it. A tall hatchet-faced young man came in. His hair was uncombed and he wore a lounging robe and slippers. A cigarette dangled sloppily from the corner of his mouth. All of a sudden he noticed her exposure and torn clothing.

His jaw dropped like a hot potato. "Gawd! What happened to—"



"Shut up, Harvey, and walk over here."

He followed her over to Grey.

"Now notice this man closely—"

Harvey, mouth agape, stared at Grey.

In a heavy mock-dramatic voice, she said, "Notice his satyrlike face; his full, sensuous lips, his lustful grey eyes; his passion-red hair; his powerful brutish build—the attacker-of-women type, wouldn't you say?"

Harvey caught on, grinned and nodded.

"Just make sure you can identify him when I give you the word—perhaps later, tonight—"

She crossed over to the door and opened it. "That's all, Harvey; good-night."

Harvey gave Grey a nasty laugh and marched out of the room.

She came back and stared coldly at Grey. The scratches on her bosom had turned a flaming scarlet. "Now are you beginning to see why you'll come back?"

Grey saw; he nodded weakly.

"Harvey, a some-time companion of mine, is also my 'yes man.' So, of course, I'm not going to risk him, either."

**S**HE FUMBLING in her bag for a cigarette, found one and ignited it. Exhaling a long plume of smoke over to Grey, she looked thoughtful for a moment. "I don't know what this magazine or journal looks like, or its name, or what the date is; all I know is that nearly the whole issue is devoted to some theoretical aspect of the atomic structure of matter." She seemed completely sober now. "Just where this magazine will be, I don't know; you may have to ransack Deventhall's whole place. Or perhaps he'll even be sleeping with it."

Grey realized that this new "trick" was going to be the most dangerous yet. And he didn't have a weapon. "What am I going to use on Deventhall in case he gives me trouble?"

She thought for a moment, then

spotted the piece of abstract sculpture. With a heave, she tossed it over to him. "That's the best I can do for you—You'll have to tap him with that."

A question suddenly puzzled Grey. "Why don't you just go up to this man and ask to see the magazine—or at least what magazine it is?"

"There are a number of reasons for that—all of them unnecessary to go into with you."

They stared at each other in silence. Then Grey said, "I guess I'm all set, now; put me on my mark and I'll go."

She crossed over and opened the door for him, handing him back the special key. "Good luck" was all she said, but she said it sincerely, and with a touch of warmth.



At the twenty-third floor Grey stepped out into another burgundy-red foyer. He began to feel that he was in a dream within a dream. Was he really walking towards Deventhall's door, with an illegal key in his hand, and a blunt instrument—the sculpture piece—under his arm? But the unreality of it all, somehow deadened the shock of his predicament—and he found himself inserting the key in Deventhall's lock and opening the door.

He stepped through into the muffled darkness and closed the door, silently. From his pocket, he extracted the penlight, snapping it on; the half-open bedroom-door came into view. He crossed over, and heard heavy sounds of breathing from the other side; he decided to shut and lock the door and make his first search in the living room.

After clicking on the lights, he headed for the curving desk of silvered oak. The room was almost a twin with Velia Ahms', except that it was a deep blue in color. All the desk drawers were unlocked and empty. He looked over the rest of the



room, very carefully; it was also empty of anything other than the furniture. Next, he checked the bathroom. Except for toilet articles, it, too, was empty of any reading-matter.



His heart began to pound. There was nothing left to try but the bedroom. Should he reach in and try to knock Deventhall out? No, he might hit him too hard and kill him—he would use the sculpture only as a last resort. The only thing to do was to go in and make the search with the penlight, trying not to waken Deventhall.

He switched back off the living room lights, then unlocked and opened the bedroom door. Inside, being careful to shield the penlight from the bed and sleeping man, he glanced it around the rest of the room—then suddenly jerked it back to a night table next to the bed.

On it, was some sort of magazine; on top of the magazine was a heavy stungun of the deadly coagulator type. Hardly daring to breathe, Grey tiptoed over. It was an old, January 1994, copy of the *Scientific American*. On the cover a headline said **THEORETICAL ATOMIC STRUCTURE** *Issue*.

Silently, he let out his breath; this was the magazine. His hand trembled as he moved the stungun off from it—

Then he froze.

**T**HERE was a sigh, then the thrashing sound of a heavy man turning over in bed. Simultaneously Grey snapped off the penlight.

He found himself suddenly disorientated from the table; the room was in pitch-blackness, and he didn't dare turn back on the light. Finally, he located one leg of the table, then nervously fumbled up it until he ran into the stungun nozzle sticking over the

edge. It fell back with a sharp *knock*. Deventhall suddenly jerked bolt upright. "*Who—*"

Grey yanked the sculpture out from under his arm, switched on the penlight full in Deventhall's face and brought the sculpture smashing down on his head. He fell back without a groan.

Then Grey's heart gave a jump.

The man wasn't Deventhall! He was staring down into the heavy no-longer-so-red face of *Storch*! Already his thick mane of snow-white hair was becoming matted with blood.

Grey felt himself start to reel. *What had happened?*

It took him only an instant to realize Storch and Deventhall were one and the same person, and that the only thing he could do now was to get out of there as quickly as possible. First, though, he couldn't help checking to make sure Storch-Deventhall was still alive.

The blood had stopped oozing from the man's scalp and some of the redness was returning to his fleshy face; his heart was thumping steadily, if not strongly.

Grey straightened up, slipping the sculpture that he still gripped in one hand into his inner coat pocket. Then, after removing his fingerprints from anything he might have touched, he picked up the magazine and walked back through the living room to the front door.

Once outside, he breathed a long sigh of relief. The "wheels within wheels" had at last come to a stop, to an end. And what poetic justice that they had ended with the man who had started them!

●

Back on the twentieth floor, Grey crossed swiftly down to her door and knocked softly.

The door opened and she stood there in lemon-yellow lounging pajamas. Smoke from a cigarette in her right hand curled up behind her head; in the other, she still clasped the stungun.



gun. Her breasts were inches from his chest and her eyes almost level with his. He slowly looked down into them; they were as cold and green as the sea. He lowered his eyes to her moist lips and watched them speak a sentence.

"Did you get it?"

A faint scent of tobacco and perfumed lipstick drifted between them. He felt her hand on his arm; she swayed slightly, touching her bosom to his chest. Her breathing became heavy as she waited for his answer; she had been drinking again.

He slipped the magazine out of his pocket. She dropped his arm and took it, then turned and walked over to the circular sofa. After closing the door, he followed her across the emerald room.

She sprawled down into a curve of the sofa and quickly thumbed through the magazine. Suddenly smiling, she slipped it down between the sofa cushions. "That was it—"

He sat down beside her and watched her grind out her cigarette in a huge silver ashtray on the coffee table in front of them. Next to the ashtray there was a half-empty pinch-bottle of Scotch and two highball glasses. She reached for the bottle and splashed a finger or two of Scotch into the glasses.

They drank their drinks in silence.

WHEN THEY were finished, she propped her still-sandaled feet up on the coffee table and glanced down to where she had stuffed the magazine. "You know, if you say anything about tonight's escapade to anyone...there's always Harvey and the 'this-man-is-my-attacker' business hanging over your head. Not that either of us could make it stick, but it would cause you a lot of trouble and embarrassment."

He nodded and started to reach for the Scotch bottle; instead, he swerved and in one smooth motion, jerked the stungun out of her hand.

She called him a name under her

breath and her green eyes flashed anger, but she made no move to retrieve the gun. Ignoring her, he removed the power-coil mechanism from the intensity chamber and slipped it into his pocket.

Grey handed her back the gun. "That was just to prevent you from suddenly deciding to hold an inquisition as to who I am and what I was doing here." He got up and systematically began removing his fingerprints from everything he might have touched. After replacing the sculpture back on the desk, he went back to the sofa and looked down at her.

Her face was a thundercloud. "No hard feelings, I hope?"

She thought this over for a minute before replying. Finally her face softened and she said, "No...no hard feelings, I guess; we both seem to be satisfied with what we got or didn't get."

Suddenly she was standing up in front of him, swaying slightly. Her green eyes glimmered sensuously out of long narrow slits. "You know...that description I gave Harvey...that wasn't all exaggeration." Her voice was warm and smoky. "In a cold sort of way, you really are a sexy son."

They stood there breathing Scotch into each others' faces.

Before he knew it, she had swayed into his arms; her bosom and thighs heaved once, then flattened against his body. He could feel the blood rushing to his face as her warm, greasy lipstick smeared over his mouth like wildfire.

She was panting slightly when he let her go; so was he.

Grey saw the questioning look on her face and shook his head. "Not tonight; I've got another stop to make."

She started to raise an eyebrow.

"Don't worry—this 'stop' wears pants."

"Then...will I see you again?"



There was a rough tenderness in her voice.

"I'm afraid not."

"Ships that pass in the night, huh?"



**B**ACK AT Galileo, instead of transferring to the Darkside capsule, Grey ran up to his quarters topside Operation. He wanted to put Storch-Deven-thall's orbit-chart in a safe place before calling again on the eccentric Wrigley Wright.

He had just finished hiding the chart when a knock sounded on the door. He opened it and there was Harvey—dangling cigarette, uncombed hair and all. "Brother, you're sure interfering with my sleep a lot tonight." He nodded at the nameplate on the door. "Captain R. Grey, huh? Well, at least you're an easy bird to tail."

Grey had a sudden impulse to beat the hell out of Harvey.

Harvey saw the look on his face. "Okay, okay—this is just a delivery!" He handed Grey an envelope, then hurriedly left.

Inside, was a note from Velia:

*You needn't be afraid ("I'm  
afraid not") any longer.  
We'll see each other again—*

Her name was scrawled across the bottom in lipstick. So now Harvey had tailed Grey, and knew who he was. He glanced again at the note, frowned at the mocking tone, then smiled; at least she wasn't without humor. He was even a little glad that she was going to make an attempt to see him again.

He tossed the note on his dresser, then went down through reception to the tube entrances. Before getting into the Darkside capsule he made sure

Harvey was gone for good, thanking the Fates that had made him stop off here, first, instead of going on out to Wrigley's.

When he finally did arrive back at Wrigley's, it was close to five. He left the jetsled where he had found it, then opened the still unlocked airlock and went in. Long, trombonelike snores greeted him as he walked down the port companionway.

He paused inside the workroom and stared at Wrigley Wright. In one hand, the man held an open comic-book at a grotesque angle; in the other, the mouthpiece of a still-smoking Turkish hookah on his desk. His straw hat had fallen off into his lap, exposing grey-streaked hair parted in the middle.

Grey unlatched and pushed back his fishbowl, then coughed slightly. Wrigley jumped and let out a grunt; simultaneously everything that had been in his hands and lap went flying into the air. Something in Wrigley's recoil made his chair tip and topple him over backwards in the best comic-opera manner.

After some puffings and gruntings, Wrigley got to his knees and snatched up the old-fashioned .45 automatic off his desk. "Ah-ha! It's you, is it! You're back, are you? Wel-l-l, wel-l-l."

Grey stepped into the room and Wrigley picked up the objects that had fallen to the floor, warily. When he had finished, Grey slipped the log-book out of his pocket—where it had been transferred—and handed it to him.

Wrigley snatched it and frantically flipped through it. "Yes, yes, yes! That's it, my boy! That's it!" Quickly, he jammed it through his air-suit—which he still had on—into the voluminous pocket of his raccoon-skin coat. "Now—let's see...our little agreement— Oh, yes! All your papers back and your fingerprints." He nibbled a moment at his walrus



mustache. "But first, but first—the key, the special key. Cost me a lot, it did."

Grey flipped him the key, first smearing off the prints with his air-suit glove as he had done the log book.

"Fine, fine! Dandy and fine! Now your papers—" Wrigley dived into a drawer and handed Grey his packet-wallet.

After checking the contents, Grey went around removing his fingerprints from every place he could remember Wrigley's having made him put them. When he had finished, Wright handed him something else: the stack of orbit-charts.

"Yes, yes," Wrigley twittered, "and no questions asked, Captain; no questions asked. A man of my word—Not keeping such traditions as that, has caused the falling out of thieves." He placed the emphasis on the last word, leering up at Grey.



Grey thanked him and took the charts, realizing that he had better take them, since Wrigley still thought that was what he had come for.

●

**IT** WAS after six when Grey finally tumbled into bed. For awhile he lay tossing and turning, wondering what the fantastic daisy-chain he had just taken a ride on was all about. At least, everybody in the round-robin seemed to be people of their word—anyway, as far as Grey, personally, was concerned.

But he was glad he had already rented an old space-tub over on Dark-side, and that he would be on it heading out for the Asteroid Belt, just

as soon as he could turn over the orbit chart to Storch-Deventhall. He had a hunch there was going to be hell to pay when the respective members of the triangle discovered that their new puzzle pieces dovetailed into earlier pieces which had somehow vanished—if, as he thought, there actually was that connection.

He could be sure of Storch-Deventhall, though—Again it was poetic justice that the man who had started him off on this round of burglary had been the only person who hadn't caught him...

He jerked upright suddenly, realizing that he had been asleep. The sharp *buzz* came again—from the t-v across the room. He glanced at his watch; it was just seven. Hopping out of bed, he went over and clicked on the screen.

It was Storch-Deventhall. His thick mane of snow-white hair only partially-covered the patching plastic on his head. His beefy face was no longer red, but grey and gloomy; only his baby-blue eyes were normal in their deadliness.

"Did you get the chart, boy?" His voice, though, was still heavy and vital.

Grey sleepily nodded.

"I'm downstairs—I'll be right up. Is your name on the door?"

Again Grey nodded, and cut off. He barely had time to get into a robe and slippers before there was a pounding on the door. He let the man in, and got the chart from its hiding-place, wondering if he should tell *all* that had happened. But he decided against it, when the big man, after studying the chart, slipped it into his clothing and headed for the door.

At the door he paused, giving Grey what was meant to be a sincere look. "All right, Grey, you're all through. You can throw the end of the month out of your mind; it's as good as taken care of."

With that, he was gone.



Grey went back and climbed into bed, feeling completely relaxed for the first time since he had met Storch-Deventhall; with that sudden relaxation, sleep again descended on him. As he drifted off, he was vaguely aware that he ought to go out to the Darkside Charter Service, where his rented ship was waiting, but then realized that they probably wouldn't be open until nine or after. He lost consciousness...

"...Can you hear me?... Can you hear me now?..."

Dreamily, Grey heard his voice reply, "Yes..."

"All right. Where's the chart? Where's the chart?"

Suddenly Grey started, or tried to, and found he couldn't; this wasn't a dream, after all! Ice-water seemed to be running through his veins; his muscles were dead, numb, limp. There was a sickening *wrench* inside his brain when he realized what was wrong with him.

Somebody had pumped him full of pentothalumine, truth-serum!

**S**OMEHOW, Grey managed to flicker both eyelids open. Two gigantic hands appeared to fade and waver just outside his line of hazy vision. In one hand, the nozzle of a hypodermic gleamed metallicly; in the other was a key...a special key... that he had seen before.... His head involuntarily rolled, tilting his vision upward—

*Wrigley Wright.* Grey felt a shiver, far colder than his ice-water-filled veins; Wrigley's walrus mustache and other eccentricities now seemed to look sinister and grotesquely evil.

Grey tried to pull his mind into focus. Chart?... Something about a chart—Which chart?

"Come on, come on! The chart,

the chart! The chart that's now not in that stack over there—the stack I gave you last night!" The whine in Wrigley's voice was now like the whine of an overloaded dynamo.

Grey fought against it—so hard that he thought his brain was going to collapse—but still his voice came. "Don't—have it...now..."

"Who, then? Who? *Who?*"

And then it came out. Helpless and wanting to cry, Grey heard himself answering all other questions put to him about his relationship with Storch-Deventhall.

Suddenly he was aware that Wrigley had gone, and that it was all over. His mind felt damp and wet and full of holes, like an old sponge; he tried to pull his muscles together, but all he got was a spasmodic jerk. Slowly his vision swam around the room. Dim corridor light drifted through a crack in the door. Wright had rushed out without slamming the door. Some how, it seemed vitally important that he close and lock the door—

With a tremendous concentration of effort, which sent his brain spinning, Grey rose out of bed—only to fall fainting to the floor.

He was slowly swimming up through a smoke-filled sea...up...up...

"Drop him on the bed, Harvey."

Down he went again—to the bottom of the sea, into a warm ooze. *Drop him on the bed, Harvey!* Had someone actually said that? His eyes, his eyes! Where were his eyes? They were still behind his lids—

His lids opened. Across from him, on the other chair, sat Velia Ahms, this time, in a blue tailored suit and shoes, with lavender stockings in between. Her legs were crossed and her skirt had slid halfway back to her lap.

"Velia," he heard himself mutter.

"Well—" Her voice was smooth as glass, and just as hard.



In spite of this, he felt a warm glow inside him.

"Well," she repeated. "What are you waiting for? A leg show?"

He tried to laugh. "I seem to be getting one."

She pulled the skirt down over her stocking-tops. "Sorry, but this isn't a social call."

Then Harvey stepped forward into Grey's vision— This time he was without his cigarette or uncombed hair, a smooth and deadly looking hoodlum. "I guess you know what we want to know," Harvey said in a sneery voice. He slapped a blackjack softly against the palm of one hand. "Like to sleep on the nice hard floors, do ya? Like hard things, do ya?" The blackjack slapped harder against his palm.

"Just a minute, Harvey—" The glassy hardness in her voice was now even harder. "Now look, Grey, we're through with any soft stuff like last night's attack-frameup. If you don't give us back that log-book, you're not going to have much of a face to speak off!"

Grey felt fear, the first real fear he had known since all this had begun. Fear—because he was still too weak to do anymore than flutter his eyelids. For the hundredth time, it seemed, he was again being forced into doing something against his will; as before, there was nothing he could do about it.

His voice was long in coming. "Okay—a man named Wrigley Wright has the book."

The effect on the two could have been no more startling than if he had said the Lord Almighty. Velia jumped out of her chair, overturning it, and Harvey dropped his blackjack. By the time he picked it up, both of them had regained their composure.

"No more questions—that's enough!" Her voice came out in a shattering rush.

Harvey was over to her side. "We

better put him on ice until we make sure—"

"All right, Harvey, stick a couple of soporate vapor tablets up his nose— You'd better tap him one first, so he won't claw them out." She suddenly turned and went over to his pants hanging across the dresser. "Now I wonder which pocket he keeps his room key—"

The *swish* of the blackjack was the last thing he heard.

THE CRASHING darkness inside Grey's skull slowly faded away...once more he found himself floating upwards towards consciousness. He bobbed to the surface and opened his eyes. Four masklike faces began to revolve around him faster and faster, the runaway merry-go-round again. He shut his eyes and tried to breathe deeply, realizing that it was his head that was revolving.

When he opened them again, everything was as it should be, motionless and stationary. The four masklike faces resolved themselves into Storch-Deventhall on his right; Velia Ahms and Harvey at the foot of his bed, and Wrigley Wright to his left. His nostrils felt free and empty; no more soporate tablets, so he couldn't be having hallucinations. Yet, there the four of them were, all together, wearing Mona Lisa-like smiles.

As he became more and more surprised, his vision automatically started jumping from face to face.

Harvey snorted. "You better give him the word, Deventhall, before his eyes jump right out of his head."

Deventhall stepped nearer to the bed, looking down at Grey out of eyes no longer baby-blue. Instead, under the snow-whiteness of his hair, they were the chilly-blue of a winter's sky. "All right, Grey, you're not seeing pink elephants—you're in your right mind, or at least we hope so." His voice was cold as his eyes. "Oh, I can imagine what you're thinking"



—he made a gesture towards the other three—"but even thieves can fall in again."

Grey's vision slowly came to a permanent focus on Deventhall's beefy face; he tried to prop himself up, but the bed and his arms suddenly seemed made of rubber. He sank back down and shifted his gaze to the plastic patch, still visible under Deventhall's mane.

Deventhall materialized a cigar from somewhere and rolled it back and forth under his thumb and forefinger, monotonously. "And—now—that we're all together for the first time, I'm afraid we're going to have to start all over again, Grey— In other words, this is where you come in again." He gave the other three a hurried glance, then glanced back down at Grey. "You 'fingered' these newly-acquired colleagues of mine, here, onto me so fast, I didn't have a chance to take care of that little matter for you back on Earth— And now I'm afraid it's going to have to wait. You see, after the three of us compared notes, we decided to bury the hatchet and pool our respective pieces of the puzzle. However, among other things, the puzzle's answer indicated that we need a ship and pilot—fast. None of this waiting around ten days for a private ship clearance-permit. Wrigley, here, contributed the pleasant information that you already had such a permit—also the receipt for an already rented ship.

"So—Grey, you're going to be chauffeuring us around the Asteroid Belt for the next several days. And that little business back on Earth will depend on whether or not you get me—*us* back safely." He stuck the cigar in his mouth and talked around it. "All right, Grey, get up and dress; from now on, you're being considered a 'bird of the feather.'"

Grey managed to throw the covers back and rise uncertainly to his feet.

His pajamas were soaked with perspiration. When he saw that he wasn't going to fall, he slowly made his way over to where his clothes were. He started to pull his pajamas drawstring when he remembered Velia.

Deventhall saw him stop and stare at her. "I meant what I just said. From now on we stay flocked together—at least until we're out in deep space." He chuckled. "Oh, you won't shock Miss Ahrms; I'm sure that by now she knows little boys are different from little girls."



"DAMN!" said Velia Ahrms. "That means we won't get away from here today, after all!"

Wrigley Wright impatiently stamped his foot. "Now, now—see, here, Velia and you, too, Deventhall—we simply can't go tearing all the way out there with only my .45 automatic and expect to do any efficient hunting. Our chances of locating it will be tripled if we all have some sort of projectile-weapon, and the more old-fashioned the better."

Grey wearily sank down to the floor of the *Eldorado's* battered old airlock and listened to the three of them go through the strange argument all over again. The earphones of his spacesuit picked up the intake of their breaths, the slight sputter of Deventhall's words, and the clicking of Wrigley's false teeth with the same intensity as their speech. He was reminded of a lot of people talking and slurping soup simultaneously—though in his present state, the thought struck him as more sinister than amusing.

He glanced idly at his wrist; two hours until midnight. And here they all were—still in the yards of the Space Charter Service, or the "Bone-



yard," as it was referred to. He stared out the open airlock at the battered old freighter and auxiliary ships which had given the Service its nickname, wondering if Deventhall & Co. would ever get off into deep space.

Two other delays had already occurred during the day. First, the procurement of a giant towing-electromagnet, which had to be dismantled before it could be taken on board—then, the added rigmarole of obtaining rations and supplies for four extra people.

The conversation in his earphones suddenly assumed a more quiet tone. Velia, Deventhall, and Wrigley were going off together in search of projectile weapons while Harvey stayed and kept an eye on him. Harvey nodded acknowledgement, and the three others stepped down from the airlock.

Pulling out a stungun, Harvey turned to Grey. "Okay, Buck Rogers, into the rocket ship."

Three hours later, the others returned laden with a child's air-rifle; an old blunderbuss of a shotgun; a lady's pearl-handled .22 automatic; and a handbag full of ammunition.

Grey was given orders to get the ship underway, and in another hour they were finally out in deep space.

After setting and locking the astro-navigational for the Asteroid Belt, Grey floated across the control nest to a shock-hammock and pulled himself down. He fastened himself in and tried to go to sleep; but the strange events of the past day kept him tossing and turning. Just what sort of grotesque adventure had he now been forced into? The whole thing seemed more and more like part of *Alice in Wonderland*. Yet, here they all were—on their way out to the Asteroid Belt to go hunting with out-of-date projectile weapons—What could they possibly find to hunt out

there? There was no life—not even so much as a microbe or spore. It was out of the question to think they were going to try to shoot several hundred prospectors, surveyors, and engineers.

In his exhausted mental and physical state, Grey began to feel that he was on a twenty-first century version of the March Hare Mission; but he consoled himself with the reminder that, in six hours, they would be at the Belt—and presumably shooting whatever was out there, real or imaginary.

For awhile he lay listening to the sounds of the ship—the throbbing of the generators; the intermittent rush and sigh of the airconditioner; close-curved walls echoing back the sound of his own breathing. The green phosphorescent glow from the instruments in the control console made him think of someone's eyes—

At the thought of Velia, a wave of bitterness flooded through him. And this made him angry; it reminded him of how he must, subconsciously, have had... illusions... about her.

He shut his eyes tight and tried to pull the corners of his mouth up where they belonged.



THE CLAMOR of the navigation-alarm woke him. Grey took his contact-lens out of its case and inserted it before unfastening himself from the hammock. Then, with one expert shove, he propelled his body across the nest and over to the navigational.

After shutting off the alarm, and cutting in the manuals, he sank down into the control chair and killed the main drive. He swung the bank of



firing-keys out from the console and began to key the steering tubes in and out, rapidly.

Slowly, a tiny segment of the Belt swam into view. He spun the ship on its tail several times, until the radar picked up the beam marker of 911 Agamemnon, somewhere in the current Jupiter "hump" of the Belt.

After keying the *Eldorado* into the beam-channel, and cutting in the main drive, he let the old freighter "home" down the beam, automatically. Faintly-glimmering astroid-reefs drifted by either side of the nest-ports, like ghostly archipelagos of space. Occasionally, the radar-screen picked up the phosphorescent wake of a far-off ship heading out to Jupiter. Several warning bells went on and off as the *Eldorado* plunged deeper into the Belt.

Finally 911 Agamemnon sprang into the main viewport, and he keyed in the braking tubes. Half a dozen Solar Authority ships were clustered around the planetoid, like fish nibbling at bait; he matched velocities with the rock, then threw down magnetic anchor grapples.

911 Agamemnon was the Port Authority for the Jupiter side of the Asteroid Belt. Any approaching ship was automatically tagged with a tracer beam; if it didn't report in for a permit-check, Solar Authority ships were sent out after it.

The airlock bell sounded and Grey hurried down to the lock. The Authority man stepped through and checked Grey's permit without removing his spacesuit.

When he had left, Deventhall and the others put in an appearance. Wrigley Wright looked more fantastic than ever; old-fashioned puttees, separated a pair of checkered golf-knickers from his tennis shoes. His straw hat had been exchanged for a sun helmet, and the racoon-skin coat for a big-game cartridge-jacket stuffed full of empty elephant-gun shells.

Both monocles glittered as he stepped forward and held out the or-

bit-chart Grey had stolen for Deventhall. "All right, now, Grey—we'll get down to business. In case you haven't already pecked at this chart, you can see that it indicates a parabolic orbit entrance into reef cluster Two Forty-one. That's all—Take us there, take us there!" After handing Grey the chart, Wrigley almost danced away with impatience.

Grey gave Deventhall a look, in case he wanted to add anything. Deventhall smiled and nodded, running a hand slowly over the nylon sleeve of his space overalls which matched his hair in snow-whiteness.

Harvey, who had been watching Deventhall, let out a snort. "Hah! All we need is the seven dwarfs to make this a real—"

Deventhall turned on him. "Yes, and I'm not so sure we don't already have one of the dwarfs with us—I'll leave it up to you to guess *which* one."

Velia stepped forward. "All right, Deventhall, leave the kid alone—He didn't sleep well."

Deventhall gave her a glittering stare. "And, of course, we have the Wicked Queen with us, too."

Velia shrugged and tried to look harmless. She had on black nylon coveralls, which covered her curves like a second layer of skin. Around her throat was a pearl choker. A hairnet, also of pearls, crisscrossed over her shimmering honey-brown hair.

Everyone had changed clothes, with the exception of Harvey, who was still wearing his rumpled lounge-suit of the day before.

WHEN GREY saw that no more humor was forthcoming, he turned and stalked back up to the control-nest. He realized he hadn't said more than two words to any of them in the past twelve hours. But what was there to say? He felt neither friendliness nor hatred towards any of them—except for bitterness, where one was concerned—and he was sure they felt the same about him, perhaps



with a slight added contempt. For it was the weakness in his own character that they were taking advantage of. Well, at least he wasn't putting up a big bluff of non-cooperation, to try and prove to them and himself that the weaknesses weren't there. Oh, hell...

Back in the nest, he pulled the magnetic anchor-grapples, disengaged velocities with 911 Agamemnon, and slowly blasted the *Eldorado* around on a new course, out of the Jupiter "hump." Meteorite alarmbells clanged softly for awhile, until the ship was well under way; then the meteorite robotics took over, automatically guiding the big freighter in and out of the treacherous, unplotted orbits of the meteor-reefs.

He relaxed back in the control-chair and opened a tin of S rations, letting canned heat sizzle the steak a few extra moments while he rolled back the chemically-cooled salad compartment. Frost-wisps rose up from the compartment, mingled with the steam from the steak, then went slowly drifting off towards the airconditioner. He removed a knife and fork from the bottom of the tin and began to eat breakfast—or, according to ship time, brunch.

He was just finishing the coffee-tube when the all-clear alarm sounded. Ahead were only the stars; the Jupiter "hump" was now behind them. After shoving the ration tin and tube into a disposal-chute, he warped the main drive to throw the ship into a slow parabola, while he slipped Wrigley's chart into the astrogation-clipboard and set up the navigationals for reef-cluster 241.

Four hours later, he killed all drive-tubes and let the ship hang stationary beside the outermost point of 241. He rigged the auxiliary firing-keys onto automatic, to keep the freighter an even hundred-yards off the point then he went below-aft to the locker-rooms.

The four of them were already in spacesuits, Harvey's wrinkling and bagging over his skinny frame like a potato-sack. Wrigley had taken the old, double-barreled shotgun, giving Harvey his .45. Velia was clutching the pearl-handled .22, while Deventhall's huge, gloved hands fumbled with the air-rifle.

What are they going to shoot, Grey wondered?

Deventhall saw Grey and opened the speech trap in his fishbowl helmet. "I take it we've arrived? All right; go back to the nest where you can hear our suit radios and stand by. From time to time, I'll give you the stop-and-go on a diminishing spiral circumference course down through the cluster."

Grey nodded acknowledgement. "May I ask just what you expect to find out there to shoot?"

"Meteorites!" Deventhall chuckled. "Don't worry; we're fully dressed and in our right minds." He snapped the speech-trap shut.

Grey, feeling slightly unreal, watched Deventhall and Wrigley Wright shuffle off to the starboard freight airlock; Velia and Harvey entered the smaller personnel-lock.

BACK IN the nest, he slipped on a pair of phones and manualized the navigationals. Then, with the help of radar, he plotted and set up the spiral circumference course. He was just finishing, when Deventhall gave him the word to move the ship five hundred yards down the spiral.

Disengaging the auxiliary firing-keys, he pulled out the steering-bank and put the *Eldorado* into a slow corkscrew. Inside the cluster, the automatics caught, dodging the freighter in and out of the meteor-





reefs, until the five hundred yard stop cut everything off.

He searched through his clothing and found a crumpled cigarette, which he had to puff on six times to ignite. With a sigh, he eased back into the control-chair and blew smoke at the stars framed in the glassite nest-dome.

Hell, here he was again, out among the stars—the present and future privilege that he was paying for by letting them push him around. Yet, for the first time in his recollection, he wasn't enjoying them; four spacesuited figures with oldfashioned popguns kept crowding them out in his mind's eye. Just what sort of hocus-pocus were they up to down there in the airlocks? Shooting meteors...? For a time, he tried to find the method in their madness—until Deventhall called to give him another five hundred yard go-ahead.

The five-hundred yard routine went on for the rest of the ship day and far into the night. Finally Deventhall and the others decided to call it quits until the next morning.

Grey removed his phones, wearily, and locked the *Eldorado* into a stationary position for the night. They had spiraled down almost a third of the way through the cluster; the entire 360 degrees of the next dome was filled with black shiny rocks, from the size of elephants to that of football-stadiums. Patches of starlight glimmered wanly and insignificantly between them.

Wrigley Wright called over the intercom that he had managed to rake together some kind of chow in the galley. Grey told him he was too tired, and that the nest had an ample supply of S rations.

When he finally had the ship squared away for the night, it was 2400; he selected a tin of boned chicken and mashed potatoes for his midnight supper.

When he had finished, he sat for awhile pondering over what shooting at meteorites had to do with the three puzzle-pieces—the orbit chart, the log book, and the "atomic structure" is-

sue of the *Scientific American*. He had long since given up wondering what the connection was between three such unbelievable characters as Deventhall, Wrigley Wright, and Velia Ahrms. Although Deventhall had implied something about thieves falling in and out...

He finally gave it up and set the automatic Watch to call him at 0600.



THE NEXT day was exactly like the preceding.

At intervals, Grey continued moving the ship down the diminishing spiral circumference, until only twenty-five-hundred yards separated them from the bottom of the cluster. It was past midnight—ship time—when this point was reached, and he prepared to knock off for the night.

But Deventhall held a brief council of war with the others and it was decided to push on and finish up the remaining yardage of the cluster before turning in. Grey wearily re-ignited the firing tubes, and prepared himself for another stretch of the five-hundred-yard stop-and-go rignamole.

Four hours later, the *Eldorado* broke out of the cluster and into free space. He swung the ship around and over to the reef's bottommost point before finally killing all but the safety tubes.

He remained in the control chair, too tired to move, and ignited a cigarette. Fifteen minutes went by; then thirty. He began to wonder why Deventhall didn't call and give him some new word, now that they were through the cluster.

As if in answer, the intercom suddenly boomed into life with Deventhall's heavy voice. "Do you want to come down to the locker-room, Grey? Something's happened."

Grey acknowledged and appeared bottomside several seconds later. Only Deventhall and Velia were there—both still in spacesuits, although their fishbowls had been removed. Tired-



ness and nervous tension had hardened their faces into grim masks, and they seemed to be watching one another. Velia's green eyes were bloodshot; her hair had somehow come undone and was falling over her shoulders. She resembled a witch—but a young and beautiful one.

The patching-plastic was gone from Deventhall's scalp, revealing the mashed wound which the sculpture-piece had inflicted; this lent a gruesome touch to his flowing, Santa Claus hair. His baby-blue eyes no longer looked babyish; tension and eyestrain had squinted them into a sinister slant.

Velia barely glanced at Grey; her voice sounded strained. "Something's happened to Harvey—"

Deventhall smiled coldly. "Yes—it seems he fell overboard." There was faint sarcasm in his voice.

"Wrigley is out in one of the lifeboats looking for him," Velia said.

"How did it happen?" Grey asked.

There was a faint sneer on Deventhall's face. "For that, we have only Miss Ahrms' word."

"Oh, shut up!" Velia snapped; "stop insinuating." For the first time she looked squarely at Grey. "I don't know exactly what happened; Harvey and I had managed to shoot up everything in sight on our side of the ship, just before we broke out of the bottom of the cluster. My oxygen-bottle had been registering empty for several minutes; so, the moment we were finished, I rushed into the ship, leaving Harvey to bring in the ammunition, empty oxygen-bottles, and safety-straps. I unscrewed my fishbowl and smoked a cigarette, waiting for Deventhall and Wrigley to come in. When they did come in, we compared notes, and there was a good deal of cursing and stomping around when it was realized that none of us had found what we were looking for. Finally, when somebody asked where Harvey was, I suddenly remembered that he hadn't come in from the airlock. I went to see what was holding him up—and the lock was empty; Harvey had vanished."

Velia brushed back a stray wisp of hair and gave Deventhall a contemptuous look. "Now for *your* insinuations— When Harvey lost his balance and fell away from the ship— assuming that as being the only thing that could have happened—he couldn't have jettied himself back with his oxygen-bottle, because it was nearly empty. And you know as well as I do, Deventhall, that his suit radio has been on the bum since yesterday—"

Grey cut her off. "All right. Did he have signal-flares with him? Good— Then Wrigley has probably already spotted him and picked him up and— assuming that his oxygen held out— alive."

Grey turned to Deventhall who, for some reason, now wore a vaguely disappointed expression. "Now what? Now that all the shooting's over—"

"Oh, keep the ship where it is, Grey." There was irritation in his voice. "After we've all had some sleep, and another pow-wow as to what to do next, we'll give you the new word."

Grey shrugged and was about to turn, when Velia gave him a long, lingering look that seemed to be full of apologies, regrets, fear, and—love. For a moment, he hesitated, staring back, aware of the sudden pounding of his heart. Then he turned and glided forward to the control nest.

He began to wonder if he hadn't imagined those things in her look— Had they really been there? Or had it merely been a combination of fatigue and tension which he had mistaken for something else? Or, because of his own mental and physical tiredness, had he done some kind of transfer—superimposing some of the emotional charge he still must, subconsciously, feel for her?

He felt simultaneously dazed and irritated with himself when he remembered the way his heart had pounded. Hell, how had he managed to let himself become entangled, emotionally, with a witch like that? As if the stars weren't enough!

His hands shook slightly as he went



about securing the ship for the rest of the night.

He lay down in the hammock without even bothering to take off his shoes. Finally he managed to somehow clear Velia out of his mind.

For a time, he tried to puzzle out what kind of meteorite they could have been searching for. A meteorite which could only be detected, apparently, by hitting it with projectiles from old-fashioned explosive weapons. But he was too near the edge of sleep to make any sense out of something seemingly as far away from sense as that was.



SOMEONE was shaking him. He sat up and rubbed away the dregs of sleep still clinging to his eyes. Slowly they unblurred and focused on the chart-light switch. He snapped it on—

Deventhall stared down at him. Heavy lines of worry now mingled with the fatigue and tension etching his face; his blue eyes glittered wanly in the pale glow from the chart light. He ran a huge hand slowly through his rumpled mane of white hair. "It's me, boy—Are you awake?" His voice sounded hoarse and old. "Listen. I lied to you the other day back there in your sleeping quarters—That dossier business *was* taken care of. Here—" He fumbled in his pocket and drew out a spacegram. "Here's the acknowledgement."

Grey took it and held it under the chart-light. It was from the board sponsor who now had charge of his dossier, saying that the dossier discrepancy would continue to be overlooked at future option meetings; Deventhall motioned for him to keep it.

Grey looked closely at him. "Why

tell me all this now? Don't tell me your conscience started to bother you?"

He shrugged. "Maybe I'm trying to buy your loyalty by showing you I didn't welch, after all; maybe I just want somebody around I can trust, for a change. I was railroaded into that deal back there on the Moon, Grey; I was in a position where I had no other choice but to bamboozle you into my further services. You see, all three of us had one piece of the information as to where the body was hidden—and in order to keep up with the others, or rather to keep ahead of them, I had to arrange things in a way that would keep us all together—until our respective hands were played out. That time has just about arrived; now I need an honest man on my side."

"Why pick on me?" asked Grey.

"Don't be naive, Grey: those other two are as crooked as a pair of loaded dice!"

"Well—What about yourself?"

Deventhall hesitated. "I won't attempt to defend myself on that point; but I think you must realize by now that there is a degree of difference—with the difference on my side. At least you have a fairly good idea of where you stand with me—and you know I'm a man of my word—even if sometimes not in spirit."

Deventhall took out a white handkerchief and wiped his perspiring face. "I don't wish to sound dramatic, but in a few hours this ship may become a cozy little annex of hell. It's going to be everyone for himself, and I'll want someone I can trust. The others will, too—and they'll proposition you at the first opportunity. This is the reason I've tried to point up my own degree of trustworthiness; because you'll have to choose sides, Grey. The others won't let you remain neutral. And, as I hope I've made clear, my side is your safest course."

Grey studied Deventhall's beefy face. "Why all the sudden revelations? What's happened?"



"Wrigley couldn't find Harvey. No signal flares; no nothing. He searched through an entire five hundred yard sphere, starting at the point where the ship broke out of the cluster. Harvey couldn't have possibly drifted even three hundred of those yards from his point of departure—that is, if he lost his balance. I don't think he did; I think Velia killed him, then gave his body a shove back into the reef cluster. That explains why there weren't any flares—and the shove would have carried him well out of Wrigley's five hundred yard sphere."

GREY FELT a sudden dislike for Deventhall. What was the man driving at? Why would Velia kill Harvey, her "yes man," of all people? Grey slowly asked, "What would doing a thing like that add up to—for Velia? For anybody? Harvey was just a hoodlum."

"Why do *you* think?" There was faint impatience in Deventhall's voice. "Velia knows where the meteorite is; that means Harvey also knew, so she had to get rid of him. And if she has half the brains she thinks she has, she'll soon realize—if she hasn't already—that the rest of us will think of that angle. Then she'll try to kill us, too."

Grey was impatient himself, now. "But why did she kill Harvey at all? Surely the punk must have been loyal to her?"

"That's something only Harvey and Velia know. When he learned the position of the meteorite, perhaps he suddenly decided it was time to go into competition with her and branch out on his own."

A vast irritation took hold of Grey. "Just what is this meteorite business, anyway? What is it—Platinum? U-238? What? And where do the popguns fit in?"

Deventhall looked genuinely apologetic. "I can hardly tell you that, Grey; after all, I'm still in the running—The meteorite's monetary value is worthless. But it gives who-

ever possesses it power beyond that of any man in the Solar System." He mopped his face with the handkerchief again. "I'm afraid you'll have to be satisfied with that answer, as paradoxical as it is, Grey. At least until my hand is played out."

Grey shrugged. "All right; so Velia knows the location of this hunk of rock or whatever it is, and now you think she's not going to divvy up with you and Wrigley. But where do I come in?"

"You don't! That's just it—the only qualification required by my side. *You don't come into anything.* No matter what the others try to make you do, try to make you see, try to make you think."

Deventhall began to fold his handkerchief neatly and methodically. "Now, tomorrow I'll want you to re-run the complete spiral circumference course. I'm going to check every meteorite in the reef cluster, personally; I don't know what Wrigley intends doing—Presumably the same thing. However, I'm afraid the two of us will be as much at cross-purposes as Velia already is with us. I don't know what's going to happen with the three of us jammed into one airlock, watching each other like hawks, or what sort of coverup, facade, or scheme Velia has worked out—and Wrigley, of course, is completely unpredictable—But whatever happens, stay out of it, Grey! Don't turn your back on either of them—especially, once they become aware of your position, your side; in fact, don't even turn your back on me."

Deventhall suddenly grinned and stuck out his hand; Grey shook it without much enthusiasm. Then the other turned abruptly, and glided out of the control-nest.

Grey snapped off the chart light and was about to lie down again, when he thought he heard Deventhall coming back—Then his heart beat faster as he listened to the unfamil-



far sound of the breathing, trying to recognize it. His eyes strained to pierce the luminescent darkness, but the green glow from the instruments made his vision waver and pulse. He fumbled for the light-switch, simultaneously realizing that he didn't have a weapon of any kind. He started to jerk his hand away, but it had already brushed the stud—

Velia came slowly floating into the control-nest; she had started when the light went on, she continued gliding over to the hammock where he was still half-crouching.

Her face seemed to be a kaleidoscope of emotions—none of which he could identify. But, already, he could sense their softening effect on his own feelings—and he found himself suddenly trying hard not to think about what Deventhall had said.

Her hair had been swept back into a silver net; that was the only change in her appearance. Despite the lack of gravity, fatigue and tension still had control of her body and face. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, she gave the illusion of sagging against the hammock. Only her eyes seemed to have any energy; the greenness of their gaze didn't leave his face for an instant.

Before speaking, she ran a red tongue slowly over lips which looked dry and cracked.

He was aware that, somehow, all of these imperfections had only increased her beauty, instead of lessening it.

Her voice, when it came, was low and dramatic. "I don't blame you... the way you feel about me. I know I'm something of a—well, never mind." She shrugged and smiled.

Grey tried to keep his breathing relaxed and normal, but the adrenalin still in his blood wouldn't let him.

"Grey..." She spoke his name very softly, almost in a whisper. "Whatever Deventhall said to you—don't believe him. He and Wrigley are up to something, or else Wrigley alone; I think it's Wrigley alone." When she saw that he was going to listen to her,

her face softened and lost some of its emotional look. "Wrigley didn't bring back Harvey; I think he purposely left him out there to die. Twice, while Wrigley was out there, I could swear I saw a flare glow through the locker-room port—"

Grey half-smiled, thinking of what her next accusation was going to be.

She stiffened at the smile. "Oh, don't you see, Grey? Wrigley knows where what we've been hunting is! Maybe Deventhall does, too. So they used Harvey's accident to get rid of him, conveniently, and—and now that the way is paved— Oh, Grey, I'm... *I'm going to be next!*"

HE WATCHED the fear that he had glimpsed earlier take control of her face. Her eyes grew larger, arching her eyebrows into her forehead; her mouth remained parted, but the tension-lines around it were slowly closing it into a grimace. Still, she looked beautiful, and he felt a sudden conflict of hopes and fears, hates and desires take hold of his inner self. Then he became aware of her burning hand on his arm, her fingers shaking slightly. It was like having her hand on his heart—and he wanted to smash her across the nest for what she was doing to him, what she was making him feel.

But emotion won over reason; he sank back against the bulkhead and tried to take a steady breath, wondering if she could hear the pounding of his heart. "All right; what do you want me to do?" His voice was little more than a whisper.

Relief slowly relaxed her face and she sagged against the hammock. Her hand slid down his arm and interlocked with his fingers. Her eyes seemed to glisten with something more than relief.

For a moment she didn't answer. Then— "Keep Wrigley away from me. Keep me here with you, Grey—please."

He suddenly reached out and took her face in his hands, drawing it close



"And Wrigley himself." to his own. "You know what's happened to me, don't you?"

She only stared at him, wide-eyed.

"I'm in love with you—" He paused. Then feeling her hot breath on his cheek—"Are you sure you wanted that to happen? Because somewhere inside of me there's still a large mistrust— So—I could hate you almost as easily as love—"

Her lips pressed against his own, silencing him. The pressure of her teeth cut into his lower lip; when they parted, her lip was also bleeding.

She ran her tongue over her lower lip, slowly. "I like the taste of your blood, Grey." Her eyes suddenly seemed to slide out of focus and she put her mouth next to his ear. "And ... I love you ..."

"I don't believe that, you know," he whispered into her own ear.

"I know...but I'm hoping you will—when this is all over."

For awhile he ran his hands slowly up and down the smooth nylon-covered contours of her back.

"Someday when you do that again, I'll purr for you, Grey."

There was silence.

"Grey—? Deventhall thinks I did away with Harvey, doesn't he?"

He nodded.

"Then why don't you—"

"Shhhh!" He wondered, suddenly, if Wrigley had the hypospray and pentothalmine pellets along. He asked her.

She jerked her head away and gave him a curious stare—finally saying, "No." He thought he saw a flicker of suspicion in her eyes.

He caught her stare and said, "Listen; did anyone see you come up here?"

She shook her head.

"All right, then stay. Here—take my hammock." He slid down and floated her into it, under the safety-strap. In answer to her questioning look, he kissed her and said, "No—I'm not going to pump you."

Her eyes again regained their new-

found confidence and friendliness. "Deventhall, then?"

She suddenly reached up and threw her arms around his neck. "Oh, darling, darling—*please* be careful!"

At that moment, disengaging her arms was almost as painful as disengaging his head from his neck.

Without another word, he turned and kicked off across the nest and through the tunnel.



HE WONDERED why Deventhall hadn't thought of the possibility of using pentothalmine on Velia—or, for that matter, Wrigley and himself. It would have been the simplest method of ending a game that was fast becoming reminiscent of "button, button—who has the button?" Why hadn't Wrigley thought of it? Unless he didn't have the hypospray along or...unless he was the one who had the button.

Grey cut across the locker-room, then through a companionway leading to the galley, where Wrigley had taken up quarters. In spite of a sudden rushing-headlong-into-danger feeling, he still couldn't shake off the warm emotional glow Velia had left with him. And to make things even more rosy, he suddenly remembered Deventhall had fixed up his dossier, after all. Now he had not only "won the girl," but he also still had his career; apparently, even March Hare Missions had their happy space-opera endings.

Deventhall, though... There had been something sincere and genuine in his appeal; somehow Grey couldn't help feeling that Deventhall was playing straight with him. Deventhall just happened to have had the wrong person in mind— And that left only one other—Wrigley Wright.

Grey pushed himself to a stop at



the end of the companionway and started to open the galley door. It was locked. More than ever, this gave him the feeling that Wrigley was going to be the climax to everything; he took a deep breath and pounded on the door—

Wrigley's voice came screeching out from the other side. "*Who's there, who's there?*"

"Grey."

There was the rattle and scrape of a long-unused bolt being drawn back—then Wrigley stuck his head out. "Quick! Come in, come in!" With both monocles gleaming under the vapor-lights and his face shiny with sweat, he looked more like a two-legged insect than human. His walrus mustache had wilted down over most of his mouth; when he spoke, it flapped up and down with his words like stunted antenna.

Grey stepped through and Wrigley slammed and bolted the door behind him. The galley was topsy-turvy; Wrigley had brought four huge wardrobes of clothing and gear along with him, and now their contents were scattered and floating all over the gravityless room. Long red underwear tried to wrap itself around Grey's head as he floated to a stop; this was followed by dozens of comic-books floating up from another direction. He wondered if Wrigley had lost his wits. Surely this couldn't be the man who was supposedly running away with the horse.

GREY SLOWLY revolved and faced Wrigley. Heavy blue-black pouches under his monocled eyes testified to the tension and nervous strain he also had been under. Wrigley breathed raspingly for a moment and tried to paste back his mustachios; finally gave it up with a curse and let them droop.

"I don't know what brings you here, Grey—but you're in the nick of time. There's a thief amongst us, Grey—a big, big thief! Not only is someone trying to run off with what we all came out here to find, but

they've also run off with the means by which the rest of us could have detected the scoundrell!"

Wrigley's words had a chilling effect on Grey. "Then—someone has stolen the hypospray and pentothalumine pellets?"

Wrigley started so suddenly that he floated three feet up off the deck. "*What? What?* How did you know I had the—? *Wait!*" With a blur of speed he whipped around and dragged up his shotgun drifting beside one of the wardrobes. The recoil of his whirl and pickup floated him off at a tangent, but he held the gun steady at Grey's breastbone. "*So! So!* You're in cahoots with Deventhall, are you! Well, well. Deventhall was the only one who saw me slip the hypospray in with the rest of my gear. And now it's gone and *you* know about it!"

Despite the imminent threat of Wrigley and his shotgun, Grey was suddenly preoccupied with surprise and bitterness. So now the finger, after making a full circle, was swinging back to Deventhall!

Grey cleared his throat and tried to make his voice sound as sincere as possible. "Look, Wrigley—In the last hour both Deventhall and Velia have been up to see me concerning their suspicions of one or another of our party. Remembering the pentothalumine hypo you'd given me, I suddenly wondered if you hadn't brought the hypospray along—and if you had? Well, I, personally, was going to put a stop to all the finger-pointing."

Wrigley waved the gun. "Well, you're too late; Deventhall has removed the means— But no matter. By doing so, he automatically put the finger on himself, once and for all."

Grey glanced around the room. "If it *was* him, I wonder why he caused all this mess to announce he was here?"

Wrigley vigorously shook his head. "No, no; the mess is my doing. When I came in from looking for Harvey—after so unaccountably not being able



to find him—I came straight here, determined to use the pentothalamine on Velia and make her divulge the location of what we were searching for. You can see my reasoning there, can't you, Grey? Especially after not finding Harvey."

Grey nodded. "Deventhall came to me with suspicions along those same lines."

"So I came back here, not remembering precisely which wardrobe I'd thrown the hypospray into. After looking in each one and not finding it, I became excited and tore out all the contents, thinking that it had accidentally become hidden amid the welter of my other effects. But, as you can now see, no hypospray or pentothalamine pellets."

GREY WAS somewhat relieved to see that Wrigley had lowered the shotgun. "And you think Deventhall is the guilty party?"

"Who else? Deventhall was the only one who happened to be around when, as a last minute afterthought, I added the hypospray to the rest of my equipment. So—he came in and took it while I was out there searching for Harvey. Oh, don't ask me why he did it—since at that time all suspicion was pointing straight to Velia—except that, maybe, awareness of his own guilt made him do it as a positive safeguard against any future time when I might have gotten suspicious of him."

Wrigley watched Grey in silence for a moment. "I know, I know, Grey—The whole thing sounds weird! I don't even know how Deventhall managed to locate what we were looking for without my knowing it. But Deventhall knew I had the hypospray; now the hypospray is gone!"

"How do you know I didn't come in and take it?" Grey asked. "Maybe I decided someone knew where this thing you were searching for was—and maybe I decided—"

Wrigley snorted. "Don't pose straw questions, Grey. In the first place, you don't even know what we're

looking for. But if you did— Oh, never mind; I'm of the opinion the others, no doubt, are—that you're the one honest person among us—"

Grey waved Wrigley quiet. "Well, there's still Velia. How do you know *she* just didn't come in here for a look around, on the off-chance that you might have brought a nypospray and pellets along?" The moment he had said it, he felt like a traitor.

"That's the long shot, Grey. True, she could have; but at the time, since all suspicion was pointing in her direction, she would have had very little reason for doing so. No—circumstantial evidence still points first at Deventhall— *He* knew about the hypospray! Then again, I don't know— Maybe Deventhall and Velia have joined forces. Maybe that's why they both came to you with finger-pointing stories. Who did they point to—me?"

"No, only Velia pointed to you—presumably because you didn't find Harvey. Deventhall, of course, pointed to Velia."

Wrigley lost himself in thought for a moment. "Well... maybe Deventhall is trying to play everybody against everybody else—with Velia doing the same thing." He laughed, suddenly, a long cackling laugh. "And here I'm doing the same thing with you—pointing the finger at still someone else— Deventhall! Well, well—now that the round-robin is complete, Grey—take your pick; you've got all three of us to choose from!"

Grey had already begun to see the grim humor of his position; a dilemma with three horns and all equally dangerous. But now that he had declared himself in one way or another to everyone— No, the only thing to do was to start back at the beginning with Deventhall. But in light of what Wrigley had just told him, Deventhall most resembled the guilty party. Hadn't Deventhall told him to stay clear of everyone and not do or believe anything they told him? Wouldn't that be the logical thing for the guilty party to say? And out of the three of them, it had been only



Deventhall who had made such a suggestion. Again, a sign of his guilt?

Grey slowly made his way through the litter and over to the door. He nodded to Wrigley. "I see your point—especially concerning Deventhall."

OUTSIDE in the companionway, after Wrigley had again closed and bolted the galley door, Grey paused and wondered what to do about everything. Should he ignore them all and take the *Eldorado* back to the Moon, or should he go ahead and play along with Deventhall? After all, there was no conflict with anyone else's interests in doing so—since only Deventhall had given him anything even vaguely resembling instructions. Still—Wrigley had planted a colossal doubt in his mind concerning Deventhall's supposed sincerity. And out of all of them, it was only Deventhall who had demanded a re-run through the reef cluster. Again—had that just been something to divert any possible future suspicions from himself, if he really did know the location of the meteorite?

The more Grey pondered these questions, the more convinced he became that even his own relationship with Deventhall wasn't all the "gentleman's agreement" Deventhall had tried to make it out to be.

But what should he do? Especially now that he had Velia to consider—

He finally came to the conclusion that, under the circumstances, there was only one thing he could do gracefully—And that was to go to Deventhall and call the whole thing quits, then turn the ship around and head back to the Moon. If Deventhall didn't like that, he'd give the man command of the freighter and let him do whatever he wanted with it. But in any event Grey was quitting.

Grey swung along the companionway, then left through a side-tunnel and down to the *Eldorado's* ore-grading

room, where Deventhall had set up quarters. The double doors were open a crack and Grey could see the back of Deventhall's white head slumped over a desk covered with diagrams and charts. This made Grey realize how sleepy and exhausted he was himself.

He parted the doors and stepped over to the desk, announcing himself as he went.

When Deventhall didn't awaken, Grey nudged him; instead of sitting up, Deventhall started moving slowly, to one side in the direction of the nudge—and continued moving—until his feet caught on one of the desk legs. Then he settled to the deck; there was a hole in the side of his chest still leaking blood.

He was dead. It took Grey only an instant to verify that.

Grey felt himself start to shake inside. Everything Wrigley had told him was a lie; he must have done away with the hypospray the moment he remembered that Deventhall had seen him bring it along. Then, about to call Grey, he had deliberately staged the topsy-turvy room-search to make Grey think Deventhall was the thief and therefore the guilty party.

But before all that, why had he killed Deventhall? Perhaps Deventhall had taken the hypospray after all, making it necessary that Wrigley kill him at once. That was it—

*And what was he up to right now?*

Grey spun around and kicked off back through the tunnel, then down the companionway to the galley. The door was open and light from the vapor-lamps streamed out of it—

Then he saw Wrigley crumpled in a heap, on the deck just inside the doorway. Both monocles lay shattered beside him; his face was a smear of blood. Grey suddenly felt sick inside. Not because of Wrigley, but at the painful realization of who had done it.

WHAT A fool he had been not to have known when he had seen the hole in Deventhall's chest. Only



one type of weapon could have made that wound—not Wrigley's shotgun or even Deventhall's air-rifle—but Velia's .22 automatic!

Grey slumped against the bulkhead, the sickening surge of his emotions taking all desire for anything out of him. Lord, how rotten everything was; how rotten Velia was! And he'd had to go and fall in love with her—

Somehow, he managed to pull himself together; he went over and picked up Wrigley's shotgun, making sure it was fully loaded, then left the galley. He didn't know where to start hunting for Velia, but decided he might as well start with the control-nest. She might even be waiting with some long fairy-tale to convince him she was justified in doing what she had done.

Or she might be there waiting to kill him.

As he neared the nest, he shifted the gun into a ready position in the crook of his arm. The hatch to the nest had been closed. After a great deal of pulling, the hatch slid slowly open with a loud grating noise.

Simultaneously he saw two things which made his heart freeze.

All the communication-equipment had been smashed to wreckage, and in the wan glow from the chart light, Velia floated several feet off the deck, her head lolling back at a grotesque angle. There was an ugly red gash in her neck below the ear.

For an instant, he thought he was going to go to pieces inside—His whole body trembled and he almost choked on the sudden lump in his throat.

Had he lost his mind? Was he seeing illusions? Everybody dead—

Then who—?

Good Lord! Were Deventhall and Wrigley really—

Suddenly he found himself racing back through the nest tunnel; he had to know if he had *really* seen what he thought he had seen.

As he neared the galley he thought

his heart was going to pound right through his ribs—

There lay Wrigley—in the doorway—just as he had left him.

That left only Deventhall.

Fear seemed to grip his chest in a vise as he backtracked to the other tunnel and turned down it. He stared for a long time at Deventhall's corpse—still lying beside the desk—the front of his clothes soaked with blood.

Half-dazed, Grey slowly made his way back up the tunnel.

He began to wonder if he hadn't killed them all himself during some sort of mental blackout—

He was just entering the companionway, when something smashed against his head, crumpling him down into darkness.



CONSCIOUSNESS returned slowly. He could feel nothing but space all around him. He seemed to be falling... falling...

With a jerk, he tried to sit up. He spun around and around—and kept spinning—until he straightened out and found himself floating in the middle of the companionway. Then the ache in his head brought back everything; with a groan he settled to the deck.

With the full realization of what had happened, fear slowly crept back into him again. Somewhere, roaming through the ship, was an unknown fifth person—the murderer.

But Grey couldn't understand why he, also, hadn't been killed, like the others—instead of being knocked unconscious. Unless the murderer had run out of ammunition. He wondered about the gun. It couldn't have been Velia's—she was dead. He had noticed it thrust into its customary place in



her coverall belt. But that was the only gun that could have done it—unless someone had gotten hold of Harvey's .45. Only, there was no one alive to have used it; everyone was dead and accounted for, except Harvey, who was presumed—

Grey suddenly started. *Harvey!* Of course! No wonder his body hadn't been found. He has been somewhere inside the ship all along!

Just then, Grey, felt his head loll back and gently strike the bulkhead. Something to starboard had nudged the ship.

He kicked off up the companion-way and across the locker-room to the freight-airlock. Through the inner-lock porthole he could see that the outer-lock was open—

Then from the corner of his eye, he noticed the port freight-room doors open. The room was empty; the huge electromagnet, which had been disassembled into two parts, was gone.

He raced around to the survival-loft, where the lifeboats were stacked; the boats were built in the form of shells to conserve space and cut down gravity acceleration. When he got there his heart gave a jump.

Out of three lifeboats, only one remained.

The nudge he had felt—that must have been Harvey blasting away from the freighter, and with an extra lifeboat containing the electromagnet.

His first thought was to get in touch with the Solar Authority patrol—then he remembered the smashed communication gear. And he also remembered Velia...dead. Suddenly, everything seemed to focus through a red haze of hate, and he knew he wanted to—*had to*—go after Harvey himself.

He pulled himself over the remaining boat's side and wasn't surprised to see that its radio-gear, too, had been smashed. After unsealing the spacesuit locker and donning a suit, he fastened himself into the control chair and yanked the catapult handle. The jets automatically spewed into

life as the boat shot out of the escape hatch.

After the sodium vapor-lamps of the ship, it took him a moment to become orientated in the black velvet of space. Finally, over the stern of the boat's open shell, he caught a glimpse of the *Eldorado*, ports all ablaze, fast diminishing into the darkness. Overhead, the stars beat down through his fishbowl, with all the shimmer of molten silver. When his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness and light, he pin-wheeled the boat over on its bow and dived for the reef-cluster.

**G**REY HAD managed to hang onto Wrigley's shotgun through everything, even unconsciousness; now it lay clamped tightly to the deck beneath his feet. Just one wing of shot hitting Harvey's fishbowl—That was all he wished for.

He cut his momentum close to zero and cautiously entered the reef-section the freighter had made its course-exit from nine hours before. Far up ahead, between massive chunks of meteor rock, he began to catch ruby-red glimpses of Harvey's jets. He realized what Harvey intended; with the electromagnet, he was going to tow off the meteorite they all had been looking for and hide it in a different orbit—or else make off with it altogether. But he wouldn't get very far if he tried the latter—The lifeboats carried enough fuel for about as far as 241 Agamemnon, back in the Belt's Jupiter "hump."

He relaxed somewhat, aware that the situation would soon be well in hand—

Suddenly, a bright fluorescent red appeared off his bow. With a start, he realized it was the high-visibility red of a spacesuit!

As he edged the boat nearer, he saw that there was someone in the drifting suit. The fishbowl had been snapped back, which meant the wearer had run out of suit-oxygen; this was done to hasten what would



otherwise be an agonizing death of suffocation. Swinging in under the figure, he reached up and hauled it down. The dehydrating effect of space had shriveled and mummified the protruding head beyond recognition; the rest of the body was as frozen and hard as a cake of ice. Whoever it was had been dead for hours.

He started to zip off the suit and look for identification—but he didn't have to. Still clutched in the rigid grasp of the right hand, was a gun—a .45 automatic.

It was Harvey.

For a moment the shock paralyzed his nervous system. Who was he following? Who was out there in the darkness ahead of him?

Wrigley? And he remembered Velia's suspicions of Wright.

But why hadn't Wrigley killed him as well?

The puzzle of that so preoccupied him that he barely caught the boat in time from sideswiping a thousand-ton meteorite. The sudden acceleration away from the rock tore Harvey from his grasp; when he regained his course, Harvey was only a tiny red flicker against the massive face of the meteorite. Grey had no intention of going back for him.



An hour passed before he again picked up the glow from Wrigley's jets—this time far below and off to starboard. He began sinking his own boat slowly through the jagged hodgepodge of meteor reefs. Grey intended to come down on Wright, just above and behind him, at an angle that would prevent his own jets from being seen.

Then he lost Wrigley again.

He turned the boat around and carefully cruised back through the area he had just come out of. He was taking a chance, he realized, on Wrigley spotting his jets for sure—

Suddenly there was a blinding flash from below.

Instinctively he threw an arm up

over his fishbowl; simultaneously there was a silent explosion directly behind him.

When he recovered from the shock, he saw over his shoulder that a gaping hole had been blown in the bottom of the hull.

The power pack was gone! And he was drifting upwards at an alarming rate. Panic paralyzed him. Without jets, Grey would drift until the boat smashed into a reef; already he was in the jagged shadow of one directly overhead.

**I**N SUDDEN desperation, Grey snatched up the shotgun from beneath his feet, then eased himself out of the control-chair harness. After slipping on a couple of boot-magnets from the gear-locker, he carefully worked his way back to what he judged was the center of the boat's mass. Pointing the gun straight upward, he began discharging it, hoping the recoil would reverse the boat's momentum.

But when the firing pins finally clicked on empty chambers, the boat was still moving upward; its mass had been too great for the shells. The only thing he could do now was to abandon ship.

He broke out seven suit-cylinders of oxygen, attached them to the carry-all belt of his spacesuit, then he walked over the rim of the boat and down its side until he was hanging upside down on the hull's bottom. Crouching, he unclamped the boot magnets, and took a mighty leap into space. As he did so, he opened wide the valve of an oxygen-cylinder and added its jet effect to his initial acceleration.

When the cylinder was exhausted, he twisted around and saw with relief that he had been successful in parting company with the boat's momentum; already it was a tiny dot against the jagged face of the meteorite.

Turning around again, he saw something that made his heart jump.



The fringe of a spotlight beam splashing over one rugged edge of the "rock" directly below him. No wonder he had lost Wrigley's jets!

This, then, was the meteorite, the object of the hunt, the object over which three people had been killed. Velia... With a savage jerk, he tried to shake off the wave of emotion flooding through him. Instead it slowly changed into hatred for Wrigley.

With a sudden desperation, which he had been too busy to realize sooner, Grey knew that he had to get to Wright's boat—not only to kill Wrigley, but for his own survival as well. His six remaining oxygen-cylinders would never be enough to get him back to the *Eldorado*; he had to get around there before Wrigley started towing off the meteorite or he would never catch him!

This time, he opened two cylinders of oxygen, and when they were empty, two more. He stared up at the under side of the meteorite—a reef-member as common in appearance as any other he had ever seen. Yet it was so unique and original that to be found, it had to be hunted with guns, old-fashioned projectile weapons—

Suddenly he was out from the underside and staring up at two lifeboats fifty yards above him.

He made certain his intersuit radio was off so that Wrigley wouldn't pick up his breathing, in case the other's happened to be on. Then, carefully changing the direction of the oxygen-jets, he drifted slowly towards the bow of the nearest boat.

Twenty-five yards away, he shut off one cylinder and used the remaining one for braking, so that when he grasped the boat's bow, it wouldn't have a tendency to raise upward. When he was floating stationary, he turned off the oxygen, then reached out and slowly raised himself until his line of vision was just over the bow.

The boat's spotlight was trained

down into the other lifeboat alongside. In the glare, he immediately caught the flash of Wrigley's scarlet fluorescing suit. His back was turned and he seemed to be putting the finishing touches to the huge electromagnet.

Grey took a deep breath and tried to slow his pounding heart. Then he was over the bow and gliding for Wrigley's back.

Because he was without boot-magnets—something Wright was sure to have on—he would have to jump him and pull the dead man's fishbowl release before Wrigley had a chance at pulling his.

Not more than three yards separated them when Wrigley suddenly straightened up and turned around. Only it wasn't Wrigley—

It was Velia.

A curious numbness crept into Grey's brain, paralyzing all perceptics, all awareness.

Time seemed to stand still.

Then the stars were spinning across the heavens—

And she was sliding in and out of focus...in and out...in...out...

FOR AWHILE, there seemed to be a forest of bells inside Grey's head; then pins and needles. It took him a long time to remember that he had eyes. When he did, they opened—

Above him, the stars had stopped their spinning, but now they hung from a strangely-constricted, cup-shaped void. With a start, Grey realized his fishbowl was off and that he was staring up through a lifeboat oxygen tent. His insides told him he was still in gravityless space, yet he couldn't move his arms or legs. Lead seemed to have been poured into them. Very puzzling—

Then, with abrupt suddenness, total recall returned.

Oxygen-starvation. With a curse, he remembered that some of the older suit models didn't have warning alarms. His cylinder had gone empty—then his subconscious had tried



to reshape reality, with Wright suddenly becoming Velia, the stars suddenly spinning across the—

Wrigley!

Grey tried to jerk erect. Only his head moved. Looking down the length of his body, he saw that his arms and legs had been spread-eagled and pinned down to the tent deck with magnet clamps.

Then, from somewhere behind, he heard a voice that chilled him. "Shh . . . relax. Rest again."

And he felt a hand on his head, gently pressing it back onto something soft and warm. Her lap.

She leaned over him and his first shock of fear slowly turned into a cold, vicious hatred. He was staring up at the ugly red gash in her throat—that he had seen back in the control nest. Only now, he saw, it wasn't a gash; it was lipstick.

Seeing the fury in his eyes and face, she placed a finger lightly over his lips. "I have you clamped down because I want you to listen to me while I tell you a story."

The flat toneless quality of her voice told him that she had been keeping herself going with dextro-amphetamine. Her face, like her voice, was relaxed and without emotion—an artificial mask somehow holding back exhaustion; even the greenness of her eyes had the glittering calmness of an idol's jeweled ones.

Some of the explanations and answers to everything went tumbling through his head for awhile. But emotion had drained him of mental energy to fit them together. Finally he just stared out at the stars, listening to one sigh of the tent air refresher.

She placed her hand on his brow again. "Can I begin now?"

Looking up at her, he felt his lips twist into faint sneer. "Wrigley once told me you'd been an actress. But first—don't you think you better remove your makeup from that last performance back there in the control-nest?"

"I'm sorry it had to be that way,"

she said, taking out a handkerchief and slowly rubbing it across her neck. "But that's the way it had to be. When you're improvising, you're always sorry about a lot of things. . ."

Her voice, even in its altered state, still had the curious effect of making him want to listen to her—even though he knew everything was over—his love—everything. "All right," he finally said. "Let's have the story."

**S**HE BEGAN to run her fingers slowly through his hair. "There was a fourth one of us, originally—A man named Obler. One day, Obler returned from space and dropped out of sight; he'd been working on a set-up for us out in the Asteroid Belt. Although neither I nor Deventhall knew it at the time, Wrigley was the first to catch up with him—back on the Moon. By now, several months had gone by—and none of us were the best of friends any longer. I don't exactly know what Obler told Wrigley, but it must have been good. Wrigley was led to believe that something tremendous had been discovered out here, but that I had stolen part of the information and location-data—a log-book. And before leaving Wrigley's quarters—but unknown to him, Obler planted an orbit-chart which had been torn from the log-book I was supposed to have stolen.

"He next came to Earth and, under trumped-up dramatic circumstances, arranged a meeting with me. I was told that the double-cross was on; he was mixed up in so tremendous a discovery that he'd been on the run ever since his return. It turned out that Deventhall was the cross-maker, having stolen Obler's copy of a scientific magazine, containing the key-meaning and description of the discovery. By the time Obler had finished his *real* cross-making, I was all set to waylay Deventhall and get back the magazine myself. However, he told me I was to go to the Moon and lay low for several days before going to work on Deventhall, that it would be



safer that way in case anyone had traced our present meeting.

"Before leaving me, he managed to plant the log-book, which I didn't know then existed, among my personal papers and effects.

"Deventhall was next on his list; he was told the same vague things Wrigley and I had been told about the discovery. Then came the variation—This time, with Wrigley as the X man; it was Wrigley who had stolen the orbit chart of the discovery's location.

"Then, before leaving, he planted the magazine. Only, Deventhall caught him—and when he saw what the magazine contained, he pumped Obler full of pentothalumine and learned that the magazine's contents was actually the description-key to Obler's discovery. He also checked what Obler had told him concerning Wrigley, and found that Obler had planted the orbit-chart as part of his double-cross. So Deventhall killed him, then and there—not realizing that I also was mixed up in it—and promptly took off for the Moon.

"You see what Obler had arranged? Each unknown to the other, he had us all at each others' throats. And even if the complex of confusion did eventually become apparent, we would be too late to do anything. In the meantime, during our preoccupation, he would have walked off with the whole works, as he had originally intended; because of the discovery's nature, again we would be in a position to challenge him—

"Only, Deventhall killed him—then, later, managed to involve you in crisscross plans of his own. But you, accidentally, turned out to be the catalyst which brought us all out of the confusion together—"

She suddenly broke off and took a long shuddering breath. "Oh, everything's so rotten, Grey!"

**H**HE COULD only stare up at her with bitterness. "You're leaving someone out, aren't you? What about

Harvey? How come you haven't told me about Harvey? Go on, let's hear some more rottenness!"

She jerked her hand away from his head. Her voice sank to a whisper. "I know... I'm part of that rottenness, too. But I had to push him off; it was either me or him. The moment we found the meteorite, I could tell by his actions and looks what he was planning to do. At that moment, as far as he was concerned, his faithful-dog days were over."

A wave of hatred flooded again through Grey. "Then why did you lie to me back in the nest? Why did you try to put the blame on Wrigley when he didn't find Harvey?"

"Because I knew Deventhall had just been up to see you— I knew what he must have said about me—and the loss of Harvey. So... Wrigley was the only one left I could shift suspicion to."

"By the way—what about Deventhall? Don't tell me he was cleaning his air rifle and accidentally shot himself?"

"Oh, hell, Grey! Do you *have* to make me sound more rotten than all the rest?"

"More rotten? I always thought rottenness was a word like pregnancy—you either are or you aren't. Now go on—let's hear what happened to Deventhall— Maybe I'll learn that there actually is such a thing as 'more rotten'."

Her words came, unsteadily, as if she were no longer sure of herself. "While Wrigley was out hunting Harvey I spotted Deventhall coming out of Wrigley's quarters with a bulge in either pocket. In spite of not seeing me, he was in a great hurry and something floated out of his pocket; it was a pentothalumine pellet. Then, later, when Deventhall went up to see you I started a search through his belongings for the hypospray and the rest of the pellets. I had to get them away from him before he eventually got around to using the hypo on me. But in the midst of my search, he came



back and caught me; so...before he could use the pentothalomine or kill me, I killed him."

Grey's insides felt as cold as ice. "Go on— Don't stop now. Let's get rid of them all— Let's hear about how you had to shoot poor Wrigley in self-defense. Or did he commit suicide over his comic-books being thrown around the room?"

Her voice suddenly sounded charged with emotion. "Oh, please... Grey...give me a chance—until I'm finished—"

He thought he heard a sob. "All right— But cut the emotion; you're not in front of any t-v camera."

**S**HE CALMED down and her voice fell into a low huskiness. "I left Deventhall and came up to the nest to see what effect he'd had on you. But, instead, my emotions got all mixed up and I suddenly found myself in a confused state about what was supposed to be happening next— Then you were off down to see Wrigley, with Deventhall next, and I realized Wrigley would put the finger on me the minute you came back and told him Deventhall was dead. The rest was like part of a nightmare someone else was dreaming; the moment you left Wrigley, I...killed him and came back to the nest where, with shocking suddenness, my senses returned. Now I had to try and make you think there was another unknown person on board responsible for the murders—to do this I had to pretend my own death. First, smashing the communication-system so you couldn't call anyone. When you left, after seeing me, I followed you and at the first opportunity knocked you unconscious— Oh, Grey, I didn't intend for you to regain consciousness so soon; I guess I couldn't bring myself to hit you hard enough."

To Grey, the whole thing suddenly seemed like the recital of an actual nightmare. "Look, why didn't you save yourself a lot of trouble and kill me like you did the others? You're

going to have to eventually, you know—"

Her voice rose almost to a scream. "*Hell, Grey, what do you think happened to me back there with you in the control-nest? I—*"

"So you went off and left me with a cargo of cadavers—to try and explain to the officials!"

"I was coming back, Grey! Just as soon as I hid the meteorite in another reef-cluster and orbit— In case Wrigley had left a record of its old approximate location somewhere back on the Moon."

Things began to seem more and more unreal to Grey. "Then I suppose you were going to concoct one colossal, final lie to account for all the other lies—your absence, all the deaths—including your phony one—who the real murderer was, everything!"

Her voice, when it came, sounded strangely off-key and menacing. "I thought —you loved me— I love *you*. You're the first man I've ever loved. I thought that by telling you the truth about all this, how everything really was, you'd continue to love me, like you did back in the control-nest— But now I see none of it makes any difference to you. And since you no longer love me— I'm—I'm—going to have to—kill you!"

He heard her put on a fishbowl from somewhere and go out the complicated flap-arrangement of the tent. At the realization that he was dealing with a psychopathic, hate gave way to a chilly fear. And, with a sick wrenching in his stomach, he even was aware that a little of his former feeling for her was coming back—

Then she was stepping into the tent—this time, from the entrance in front of him. She had her fishbowl off again and one hand was grasping a space flare pistol. *At least this way, he thought, it will be over in a hurry— Flame and smoke—then not much of anything.*



"I'm sorry, Grey...it has to be... this kind of death— There aren't any other weapons left—"

He saw that she was crying. The pitiful look of tragedy on her face, in spite of everything, made a lump rise in his throat. Perhaps the lump was also in part due to his own helpless position—

She came closer and, for a moment, couldn't get any words out. "*I...I ...love...you—*"

Despite his choked-up feeling, he somehow managed to find words of his own— "So long— I guess I loved you some after all..."

For a moment, she trembled all over. Then, with a cry, she dropped the pistol and slipped the magnet clamps off his arms and legs.

He was too dazed to do anything but sit up.

Whimpering like a small child, she threw her arms around his neck and buried her face against the rough fabric of his suit.

HE HELD her for awhile, listening to her sobs and the pounding of his heart. *What a store of emotion she's had repressed all these years*, he thought; *all egomania*. She should have been searching for the one thing ...she really had wanted; but now that she had it, it was too late. Even his own little-understood feelings for her couldn't change what she had done in the past. *But, at least, I've given her what she most wanted. Maybe that's why I feel as I do— subconsciously I saw her need...funny, I love her for it.*

And now because it had all happened, he was still alive. But even that didn't change what she had been in the past; it was too late for love to ever change her basic personality. Her character-pattern is locked within her, and she'll follow the line of least resistance.

No, he knew only too well what love with her would be like. Without being able to help herself, Velia would settle a net of possessiveness

over him; from then on it would be the old "we two against the world" idea.

She was looking up at him. Her crying had stopped, but there was still a veil of tears in her eyes. "What's going to become of me?" she finally asked in a timid voice.

He found it hard to face her stare. "We won't talk about that, now— We're heading back to the ship." He started to get up.

She clutched at him with all the strength in her arms. Her voice sounded strangled. "This is the end—for me, isn't it?"

He couldn't bring himself to answer her.

She was silent a long time before speaking. "I guess I understand— Since all the rottenness turned out to be in me...you don't want to take a chance...ever again...with your feeling..."

He kissed her—and tried to put into it all the "might have beens" that would be his only company in the years to come.

When he took his lips away, her eyes had an unreal far-off stare in them. "Goodbye...goodbye..." she whispered.

He got up and gently put her on the deck, with one magnet over her arm to keep her from drifting. He spotted his fishbowl in one corner of the tent and put it on; then he made his way through the flaps and out into the starry darkness.

Enough tent-oxygen had collected in his suit and fishbowl to carry him up to the oxygen-locker, where he selected and inserted a fresh cylinder in place of his empty one. He also clamped on a set of boot-magnets and broke out the medical supplies.

After digging out a strong sedative and flask of brandy, he clomped his way back to the tent. She lay staring glasy-eyed up at the ceiling. He raised her head and she took the sedative and brandy without a word. Then he walked outside again and, for a long time, stared at the stars.



Finally, when he had managed to clear the mist out of his eyes, he cut loose from the other lifeboat containing the electromagnet and turned up his own jets from stationary anchorage to full drive.

**WHAT** *A lousy way for it all to end, he thought. Turning the woman I love over to the authorities ...because I haven't the guts to run away with her—*

Suddenly his heart skipped a beat; maybe there was another way it could end for her.

He raced back to the tent.

With a shock, he realized she had anticipated him; she was gone!

The sedative hadn't been strong enough to overcome all the dextro-amphetamine in her system. He smiled a sad smile. No wonder she had said goodbye so poignantly; she was taking the other way out.

Grey stepped out under the stars again and watched the fluorescent red of her suit drifting back towards the other lifeboat and freedom. For awhile, at least. The other ending—

Occasionally the spaceflares she was discharging as a propellant went sailing through the vacuum, illuminating the jagged nightmarish-face of the meteorite that had caused all the trouble—

With a shock of irritation, he suddenly realized that he still didn't know what the shooting had all been about—

A meteorite which could only be identified by discharging projectiles at it—

*"...it gives whoever possesses it power beyond that of any man in the Solar System..."* Deventhall had said.

He thought of the blinding flash of light. Velia had surely known about that—why hadn't he asked her? What had she done, thrown some explosive at the meteorite to make sure

it was the right one? And the flash must have told her— At the same time, knocking a tiny chunk of ricocheting matter through his lifeboat bottom.

But what sort of matter could the meteorite be made of to give off energy like that? The flash looked as if it had been made up of pure energy. Something that was as yet impossible, except in theory. It would require a totally different kind of matter—reversed matter with the protons on the outside of the atom and the electrons on the inside. Contra-terrene matter, *seetee*—

*That was it!*

His insides turned to water. *Oh, Lord, he thought, I was letting her run away with it.*

*The first contra-terrene matter ever to wander into the Solar System!*

In panic, Grey flung the boat around and back towards the vanishing flicker of fluorescent red. Then he suddenly remembered his intersuit radio and jammed it on.

Faint sounds of labored breathing came through his phones. Her circuit was open—*"Velial!"* he yelled. *"I'm coming back after you—I Don't try to get away with that seetee—"*

A high-pitched wail cut him off. *"Oh, Grey...I'm not running off—I didn't have the courage to go back with you—I don't have the guts to end my life any other way, but this instantaneous— Goodbye!"*

With a scream, he threw his arms over his fishbowl and flung himself down in the bottom of the boat—

Searing light crept through his shut lids, while the boat, along with a reef-section, was tossed backwards and upwards, out of the cluster and into space.

When he could see again, he saw the stars—the stars glistening wetly, like a sky full of tears.





# Unreasonable Facsimile



## Novelet of Tomorrow by Lester del Rey

**Anya knew that, when the time came, women would go out to the planets, and no military minds would stop them. But that was in the future; now, and for the days ahead, those women who left Earth would be only unreasonable facsimiles — colder and tougher than men, but without the inner strength that gives men pleasure in fighting against nature. They'd be like Anya herself . . .**

**A**NYA AIMS WORTH watched him coming across the crater floor toward the observatory, and her hands went numb and cold on the keys of the computer she was using. It could only mean bad news; Johnny Garth never strutted quite that much unless it meant bad fortune for her.

As he drew nearer, she saw that the General's star on his shoulder was freshly-polished, gleaming in the light of the glaring sun. His space-suit was impeccable, his blond head bobbing with satisfaction. It would mean less power for her; it could only mean that.

She reached for her compact and comb, then tossed them down savagely, denting the fragile things that were made light for shipment here. She put

them away, and shook her tousled, almost mannish-cut hair back. To hell with him! And with all the stupid, smug, gold-braided military fools who thought only their work was of any importance. He'd been in her classes once—and she still had lessons to teach him.

But she knew she was wrong. Johnny had gone too far, when he won his star and become head man here on this little colony, now barely fifteen years old. He had swaggered his way into it, as he had always won what he wanted.

And she'd taught him that—when he was sixteen and she was twenty; she'd dressed him down before the class, ground the math into his head, and made a fool of him, until he no longer cared what she could do. He'd ended



the year by laughing at her, as he'd laughed ever since—a laughter that had begun as a way of hiding his embarrassment, and come to be a thing for itself. Now, at thirty, he was still the boy who had finished first in her class.

He stepped through the air-lock that snuggled around him to prevent the loss of air, and threw back his helmet. Wilma and Jenny, Anya's two assistants, seemed to take on a sudden bloom as he entered—and both of them married to fine men here! Anya went on at the calculator, her back rigid, her fingers drumming on at a uniform rhythm, feeding in the complicated symbols she had invented.

He stood behind her, his fingers in her hair, until she felt a tiny stab of pain. Then, as she swung around, he laughed. "Hi, Two-Dots; grey hair!"

"Good morning, John," she answered. As a civilian, she was not compelled to salute, even though other civilians did. She glared at the hair, cursing herself for not finding it. It gave her age away, even though the light gravity of the moon made keeping youthful beyond her years easier than she had thought.

He picked up her coffee-cup, located the smear where her lips had touched it, and gravely sipped it. "I kiss you passionately, grandmother—with due symbolical restraint."

"And undue lack of sanitation!" She turned to Wilma, the slim blonde, and nodded. "A cup of coffee for General Garth—and a clean one for me."

Johnny was playing with the hair, caressing it in his fingers. She knew better than to snatch for it—it was what he wanted. He grinned again. "You worry too much, Two-Dots."

"All right—get it over with. You're here to rob me of the power I need for the screen! How much?"

For a second, his face was sober. "I'm not doing it—it's straight from Earth. And it's going to be rough, I'm afraid; you're cut to ten-percent."

Anya felt the surface drop out from

under her, leaving her suspended among the cold stars overhead. But she had learned to take her medicine, and she took his without a sign. "It won't power the wire-laying machines, John. I can't get the screen up with it; I need *more*—not less!"

HE WAS staring out at her work-pile, and he shook his head silently. She hesitated, then came over beside him, pointing to the net-work that was going up in a great circle around the big telescope above them. "Three weeks more, John—three weeks and I can try it; the little one works already."

He grinned down at her, shaking his head. He didn't need to say it. She'd spent two years on the model—a little, flickering blue screen that covered a foot, and bent up to form a little dome. It would deflect a piece of tinsel away from the inside—if the tinsel wasn't too big.

"The big one won't be like that—it takes a certain amount of voltage to make it work, John. And I can't use that in the model. I never wanted to build the model, anyhow; I said it wouldn't work."

"But it *does* work," he pointed out.

Anya shrugged. It worked—but only because she'd spent endless nights when she found that they insisted on having a model before they would let her go ahead with the full-sized screen. It shouldn't work—she couldn't entirely tell why, though she'd made the tiny adjustments herself. And it only operated for one millionth of a second out of each quarter-second; the big screen would be continuous.

"There's the telescope," she pointed out. "Millions upon millions of dollars invested in it—and it's open to the first meteor that comes along. We built the mirror in sections, and ground it here; we brought all the frame from Earth. And now it's to be ruined because you take the power away. We've already gotten by without a meteor striking it longer than the theoretical limit. John, it has to be



protected—and my screen will protect it.”

He shook his head. “Send the girls out, grandmother.”

She nodded, and they left. He sighed, and then his grin was back. “You don’t have a chance, girl. Undetectable missiles just downed our space-station; it blew up! And you want to putter with the telescope, when all Earth has to depend on us to keep the peace, now.”

“Undetectable?” The word stuck in her throat.

He nodded. “They spotted them a few miles away—because they cut off the Earth—we got part of the message before they exploded. Somebody’s out to get us—and we don’t have another station. We’ll have to hope we can drop bombs from here fast enough to stop the trouble, when the war begins—while they’re dropping them from their own station, only five hundred miles from Earth!”

He spun on his heel, and went swaggering off, through the lock, as if he hadn’t just reported ten of the world’s finest men dead, and the long-feared hydrogen-bomb war at hand.

Then she went grimly to her space-suit and began dressing to go out on the surface. The stupid fools! The blind fools! She snapped down the helmet, and moved after him, seething within herself. Twelve wasted years, driven beyond her furthest powers, and yet always driving a bit further—and for a lunkhead!

She’d been content to watch the men go out to the space-stations and then to the moon, until Johnny went. She’d gone on teaching them the mathematics that came so hard to them—as she’d been doing since she was fifteen—and the youngest graduate of M.I.T. in her generation. Then she’d tried to go out.

It was her first experience with what she had come to consider the military mind. They’d told her that space wasn’t for a woman; no women went out.

FOR NINE solid years, she’d sweated against that, organizing committees, fighting against prejudice, and working on in the knowledge that she could do nothing that way. She’d stayed awake until dawn so long that she no longer even knew what real sleep meant, forcing her brain beyond its capacity—which was supposed to be as high as that of anyone living then.

She’d put all the sciences under her control, and it hadn’t been enough. She’d come up with ideas—and the brass had accepted them, given her citations, offered her officerships which she refused, and told her to stay home on Earth. Women were for Earth and babies.

Anya gagged bitterly as the idea crossed her mind.

Men in space couldn’t be bothered with a few women—it would make for friction. She could point to hundreds of men around her, with not a single idle proposition to her credit—but they seemed to think that didn’t matter. She knew how bitterly it *did* matter—she’d tried, when it was too late, to learn how the women got their men; but the years under her fanatical father and then in the schools as a child teacher of men had left her no way to approach men.

The military mind still classified her as a woman!

She’d built them the first screen seven years ago—the screen that held back all the radiation from their atomic engines, and made them light enough for space. That couldn’t be done—but she’d done it, using a brand of mathematics that no man had ever been able to learn, though a few young students were showing signs of mastering. She’d invented that to make it possible.

And she’d stopped being a woman when she first tried it out, in its early form. It had leaked—not fatally, but enough to sterilize her.

It had been the summer that John had gotten a surprise vacation, and come to see her, while she was just recovering. He’d laughed at her burns,



too—but he'd proposed to her then, babbling like a fool about a home and children! And a year later, he'd thanked her for turning him down—space was no place for a woman, and she should get herself a *normal* husband.

Seventeen years of being in love with the fool, and following him out here, when it couldn't be done. And now he laughed when he told her the station had been taken out by the beginnings of war. He thought it was cute that the screen she'd designed to protect the great telescope couldn't be built.

Damn the telescope! She'd picked that project because it was one that was useful only on the moon, and because she was the only person who could build it. It had won her her right into space, finally—along with the two wives of officers here whom she'd half-killed herself training, so that the wedge could be driven in more firmly, and they could never honestly refuse women the right to go into space again.

Some day, man would reach the planets—when he put some of his energy into that, instead of into military institutions to keep the peace that could be kept only by peaceful living. And then women would have to go along, to bear the children she could never bear.

She reached the cave, into which most of the moon colony had buried itself, and went through the lock. A sergeant let her in with a grin, and she wiped it off his face. "General Garth, Petel! And no nonsense!"

She'd gotten her training thoroughly, when she was a child-wonder trying to teach men what was almost impossible to teach. Her voice seemed to lift him up two inches into an automatic salute, and he was serious and respectful, suddenly. "No admittance to General Garth's quarters!"

Anya straightened and walked forward. He came after her, but she went on, not seeing him. He hesitated, then made another dash. "You're

deserting your post!" she told him sharply.

She heard him dialling frantically, but she went on. It had taken years to boil it down to attitude—instead of mere words—but she hadn't failed with anyone except Garth for longer than she'd been on the Moon.

**HIS** DOOR was ajar when Anya reached it, and she knew the message had preceded her. She stepped into the little office, to see him straightening up over the wash-basin, drops of the economical jet-rinse still on his face. She swept the room, and went over to his table.

She capped the bottle calmly, and set it back in the little cabinet. "It's no good, Johnny. Or maybe it is. I came here to tell you I thought you were rotten all the way through—and now I'll only have to tell you you're rotten inside; outside, you're just a hypocrite."

He nodded, forcing the grin back onto his face. "Thanks, Two-Dots! But... Bob Crandall was on the station. It got me, I guess, for a minute." He wiped his face dry, and shrugged. "Anyhow, the men are happy. I'm happy, so why should they worry? But you won't get more power; take a look!"

She picked up the flimsy of the uncoded Earth-message, and put it back down. "It says ten-percent power, and no more; I'll take ten-percent of the total power of the atomic generator, then."

He frowned at that. Anya knew she was trying a play that he had no right to give in to, but...

Then he laughed. "A trick of words, eh? Grandmother, sometimes I think you've got the only real calculator in the world in that grey-haired dome of yours; it never misses. That's sixty-percent of what you've been getting."

"Fifty-seven and one-eighth," she corrected him automatically. "It isn't enough."

"I could be broken for giving it to



you. Earth is in a grave emergency—and you're risking the life of every man, woman and child down there when you touch one erg of our power for anything but protecting them, Two-Dots!"

She cursed at the military mind again. "Do you think it makes any difference, John? Can't you see that they wouldn't have hit the station without having enough stuff to take out this base, too? They aren't taking any chance of our getting them."

"They can't reach us—remember the cones you taught us about? We can practically drop it down onto their laps—and if our bombs miss a few hundred miles, it won't matter. But they have to hit right on the button. We don't even have an atmosphere to be poisoned."

"If they've got undetectable bombs, atomic-powered, they can take us. They can spot us, Johnny, because we're the only place on the moon where there's metal right on the surface in any quantity. That telescope is a homing-beacon to them—unless I can get the screen up. If I do, maybe I can save us; if I don't, all the power you have won't help you."

He shook his head.

A messenger came in with another flimsy, and he read it. Then he threw his head back and laughed, tossing it to her.

It was what she might have expected: *Correct previous order, read telescope research screen-project shall receive ten-percent surplus power, maintain living conditions within dome, no more.*

"It's out of my hands," he told her.

"Then let me have the radio to myself for ten minutes!"

"Too much power. And too much publicity about what has gone on; I can't permit it."

Anya stared at him, and then swung about and marched out. She couldn't argue with him any longer; he was a fool, a stupid military jackass who set orders above the possible safety of the whole moon. But he'd gotten to be General that way. All the original

thinkers were kept at the bottom, because they *did* have original thoughts.

**S**HE HEADED toward the power-cave, where the atomic furnace drove the generators that powered the colony. The order would have gone through already to cut most of her supply-lines, but she had to see which ones.

They let her in—the engineers had more respect for her. The screens weren't as efficient on these large installations as on the small ship engines, but they reduced the danger of working. There was no living engineer between here and the other side of the Earth who didn't bless her—except when they crossed her will.

"Which ones are you cutting off, Joe?"

Joe pointed—all were off except the line that led to the little dome in which she and the girls lived. She moved forward and cut that switch, replacing it with another.

"What shift are you on?" she asked next.

She checked on that, and nodded. "I'm drafting you men—you can get along with four hours sleep—you'll have to. And don't tell me it isn't official; I know that. But if the girls and I can get by without heat and power in the dome, you can do something for your own good."

It took more talking, but the use of the girls' sacrifice was a good point, and she finally made it stick. She'd have a trickle of power in the welders, which were important.

"And if you don't want them kidding you, you can get some of the other men working with you. Be good for the lazy bums; they grow fat here without exercise, anyhow!"

It might help some, but not much; she didn't expect to have any major turn-out.

Wilma reported it to her first when she reached the little dome. "Any,



there's no power; the calculator won't run and the lights are low, and—"

"I know it. We'll live in our suits from now on; they have to keep the suit batteries charged. They can't change that rule. And if you don't like it, I'll ship you back to Earth on the next rocket!"

They grumbled—but she'd expected that, and refused to admit she heard it. Her threat to send them back was her strongest hold there; they'd been dying to come to live with their men, before her intensive training and stridently-voiced demands had finally won them the right. Without her, they'd still be on Earth, waiting for the rare vacations that would bring their husbands home; she could have picked better helpers, and they knew it.

She watched them trying to adjust to the suits which had been worn for only an hour at the most before. They could live. It wasn't pleasant; the air soon became strong with odors, and too damp. The temperature stayed even enough, but the heaters moved closer and further from the skin as they walked about—and at times it was distinctly uncomfortable. Nobody'd ever designed a really good suit yet. Eating and drinking would mean going back to the main cavern, of course.

As for the other necessities—well, they could learn to control themselves!

**A**NYA FOUND the big scope still working. The astronomers were technically independent of her work, busy about their own calculations. She didn't argue there; she cut their cables, and began splicing them onto her own. They were down to a minimum power, but the scope was granted some leeway, on the theory that it might spot any rockets that came out without being detectable by radar!

It wasn't hard to convince them; she herded them into their own building at the foot of the scope, and

pointed to the screen that was being built. "Out there you see something that can save your precious telescope. But it can be used to ruin it a lot easier. I can pump what power I have in, and try to make it work—but I must warn you that my *latest* theories indicate that a low-powered screen may simply heat up the surface around it to a few thousand degrees. And of course you know what it would do to the telescope!"

Graves, the youngest astronomer sprang up at once. "It would take more power than you have to heat us even a hundred degrees, which we can stand. Are you threatening us, Aims-worth?"

"No threats are being made." She smiled softly, examining him for fleas with her eyes. She must have found some, since he began to twist uncomfortably, as if he itched. "My theories may be wrong—but strange things happen in early experiments. Why, even a common welder has enough energy to ruin the scope, if applied correctly; you can see what could happen if the screen went wild."

Bascom, who headed the observatory here, chuckled. "You're just the girl who could do it, too, Anya. But I've been guessing at some things which make me think our telescope could be ruined under certain conditions; I don't know how true my guesses are."

He waited for her almost imperceptible nod, and shrugged unhappily. "Quite so. I think we are going to require a lot of power to keep the scope pointed toward Earth—but, of course, our cables are probably inefficient. They may leak a little. And so long as we get the telescope pointed correctly and keep it there, who cares?"

Anya managed to smile at him with a little warmth. He was a civilian, too, who'd butted up against military necessity. Once the scope was pointed, it would draw no more power—in this case—as they all knew. But Garth could protest afterwards.

It still wasn't enough; but it might do for a while.



THE SCREEN was nearing completion. It was an elaborate mesh of wires, running in a circle around the telescope, covering about three miles of circumference. Anya couldn't explain it; she knew in her head how it *should* work. She'd spent time enough poring over the behavior of some of the stars which had been discovered to have almost no radiation, and thought once to be cold—but now known to be holding the energy inside themselves until it reached impossible limits, and a temporary nova was born. There were other reasons for novae, of course—but this was the one that had driven her crazy for agonizing months, while she tried to calculate the gravitic stress that existed there.

The mesh of wires was simply a complicated transformer that took enormous voltages, and not-small amperages, and turned them into something which was totally foreign to normal electromagnetic energy. It would spread out as a dome of sheer energy over the mesh—or so she hoped.

It was a partial solution to this which had led to the screens around the engines.

Anya went back into her cold little dome and dropped down on a bunk in her suit, staring through the top toward Earth so far away. She couldn't hate the planet, even though it was trying again to tear itself to pieces. She had never hated people, as a large group. They were like children the first day at school—but with the right control and leadership, they could be made into the finest type of men and women.

Now, there was a budget for defense that had built these bases—this one and the ones that were still incomplete, as well as the space stations between Moon and Earth. But science was another matter. The telescope, here, had been built by contributions, and not at government expense. Once built, it had proved to be valuable enough for the military rulers to take it over, and to support it—which was

why they'd reluctantly cleared her for work here. But not until it was finished could they give it their seal of approval.

It was all wrong. Man should have left his wars on Earth. Out here, there was room for a laboratory and the observatory—and a stepping-stone to the planets. But while the money had to be spent in sending up bombs and maintaining a little military camp here, the planets would have to wait.

And the women of Earth would have to wait while their men went off to war.

Anya snorted at herself; she was getting sentimental in her old age. Maybe the grey hair had been a symbol. But when she held up a mirror, she doubted it. Most girls of ten years less would have been happy with the face that looked back. It wasn't her looks which had chased the men away.

Nobody waked her. Wilma and Diane had suddenly found that there really wasn't anything they could do in the little dome, and had gone to live in the officers' quarters with their husbands. She'd shrugged, and let them go; sometimes, she wondered if the women weren't as responsible for the sorry state of the military attitude as were the brass themselves.

After two hours, she awoke by herself; one side was scorched from the heating wires, of course, but she expected that.

She went out, getting the tools ready. And the men came out, finally. She'd guessed correctly; there were the engineers and a few others. Surprisingly, young Graves showed up, too. She explained their work simply enough.

"I don't have power enough to run the tractors. You men are going to be the tractors!"

They kicked, and two of them started back, until they heard her explaining their reasons to the others. They hesitated, then, and she went to



them, driving them back with orders that were short and specific.

ANYA PICKED up one of the spools of wire that would have weighed four hundred pounds on Earth—and still weighed nearly seventy here—and began moving out towards the open section of the meshwork, with a welder slung over her back.

"Easy, grandmother. Remember your grey hairs."

She jerked, but caught herself in time. Johnny stood there, grinning at her, his radio wide open for all the men to hear. The damned show-off!

"If you want to help, get your own spool," she told him.

He shook his head. "Some of these men are needed for emergency duty at any time. They'll have to go back, Two-Dots. You—Henry, Albright, Fullerton, Spinnagel, Kelinsky, Dorsten—back to quarters; the rest can stay if they like."

Anya shrugged. Nobody else left, though most of them stared at her thoughtfully before picking up their loads again. Then Garth grinned. "I've decided my officers are getting fat, grandmother. Did you ever conduct a course in calisthenics?"

She frowned at him. It had always been one of her major shames that her first teaching job had been at a small school where she was expected to give physical education to the girls as well as teach mathematics—before she got the job with the newly-formed space school. But, for once, his solution was better than hers.

"I can give them reducing-exercises, John," she agreed; "and you can stand some yourself. You're getting heavy around the head."



They worked for a full seven hours, and the mesh grew. But it was less than could have been done in half the time with tractors. Men couldn't stretch the wires properly, and couldn't hold them in place for her.

Anya had to do all the welding herself—since she alone could follow the pattern that the mesh must take—and tacking it down with the welder was the smallest time-consumer of her job.

She'd watched the men carefully, and now saw the first signs of rebellion; they'd refuse to come back, if she drove them any longer. She waved them off, making her thanks sincere and honest.

Johnny dropped his spool and went with them, without a word. He hadn't spoken to her since she'd ridiculed him in front of the men. It wasn't like the old Johnny she knew—but it came as no surprise. It was time he went all the way out on his dignity—that would probably get him another star on his shoulder.

She stared at the mesh, hating to admit what she saw. It would never be done in another night—and the bombs wouldn't wait any longer, if they were coming.

Johnny came swaggering back, now that the men had left, and his eyes also estimated things. He shook his head. "You can't do it, mop-head; you won't have that much time. Our supply-ship is overdue."

She ticked off the orbit in her head, and nodded. He was right—the bombs would be coming first, if they were all at the same distance.

"You've got a half-dozen men in the brig for that escapade they pulled with the liquor supply," she reminded him.

"No can do! I can't assign them to work. If they want to volunteer, I'll release them into your custody; but I can't make their sentence any tougher than it is. There are rules, in case you never heard of them."

"Johnny!" She turned to him. Then she bit it back. If he couldn't see how important this was, there was nothing she could do. Maybe it would be just as well if men did lose the whole base, including the telescope. Maybe they'd stay home on their little world, then, and not infect the other planets that were too sensible



to go throwing atomic bombs around. Maybe man didn't deserve the planets.

She picked up the welder, took a pry-bar, and forced one of the wires into place. She held it with one hand, bringing sweat to her forehead, and tacked it down with the other. Johnny watched, and grinned at her. "You'll have to go some to finish it all alone. But if it makes you feel any better, go ahead."

He marched off across the surface of the moon, whistling. Anya cut off her headphones; she couldn't cry now—she hadn't cried since he'd thanked her for not marrying him. She had work to do.

**A**BOUT AN hour later, Wilma and Diane came out. Their faces were sullen, and they refused to explain anything, but they pitched in. It helped a little. Some of the sullenness left after they'd gotten warmed up; it was too busy for remembering grudges.

Johnny strolled out again. "Women of the World, arise!" he greeted them. Anya refused to look up.

She welded another connection, slowly and carefully, before she could trust her tongue. "I think your men need you, General Garth. You seem to forget that vaunted responsibility if you have time to turn into a sidewalk superintendent."

It was feeble.

She knew she could do better, and tried to think, through the bitterness and the fatigue. Then she was surprised to hear the other two women snicker.

She frowned slowly, and grinned at him suddenly—or tried to. But he had turned away; she couldn't tell whether he'd seen it or not.

It was one of the men from the brig who told her what she'd suspected. All six of them came out an hour later, and began pitching in. "Women!" The man shook his head. "Damned fool women! This was a good place until you came."

"You can go back, DuBois," she told him.

He shrugged. "And have to sit watching you females trying to do men's work."

"Garth changed the brig, eh?"

"Yeah. He said we needed sunshine, so he posted us outside, where the whole damned colony could watch us!"

She felt better, then. Johnny might be a fool, and he was a jackass to make a joke of all this; but she could imagine the ribbing the idle men must be getting under his careful supervision, while they sat idly watching the three women. She wondered what he'd told the two girls—umm, he could probably detail them work, now that they were living off his stores and using his quarters. It must have been pretty unpleasant to drive them back here.

The web of meshwork grew—hastily, clumsily. She detailed the simpler work to them, laying out the broad pattern herself. She couldn't be sure it would hold—but she had to hope.

*Damn Johnny*, she thought for the thousandth time. If she'd only been younger—if she could have given him the children any man wants...

She caught herself, and plunged on with her work.

Graves came out from the telescope base, waving a wet plate at her; she grabbed it. It was faint, but something was there. Her head buzzed with possible orbits, but it wasn't enough evidence. Anya sent him back for the next.

It was definite enough this time—and worse than they had thought. She ran the little measuring-caliper across the two plates as she held them together, and her head clicked busily. "Four hours, seventeen minutes—plus or minus half a minute," she said softly.

Graves frowned. "You can't know that close. We figured..."



"Take her figures," Johnny said softly. She hadn't seen him come up, and she felt color rise to her cheek, as she turned quickly back to the welder. "Anya Aimsforth can still do things in her head better than your calculators can—she only uses the things to keep her fingers supple. And I'm not joking this time."

He turned back to her. "Sorry, Two-Dots. I need the men now—most of them. I've got to run interceptors on those things. Can you give me the course and exhaust?"

"No, Johnny. You can't hit them—if there's any grown he-man here who 100% accuracy, with no plus or minus. Your searching heads won't work. But I can give you something to go on, if you have to satisfy your military bosses." She reeled off a few figures.

She'd hoped he'd take her word and forget it. She should have known better; he was gone at a run with the men.

"All right, the rest of you," she told them. "Now get the lead out. And if there's any grown he-man here who can't do as much as I can, I'll thank him to go hightailing back to barracks now."

**S**OME OF the men came back, later, and some others left. She no longer had time to keep track of them; the two ends of the mesh drew together, but not fast enough.

When four hours were up, she quit reluctantly and turned back to the power-supply lines. They had already been coupled onto the telescope supplies. She lifted an eyebrow as she saw the meters, and Graves shrugged. "We asked for power—and they've been giving us all the lines would carry. You've got it all; we have our hut cut off completely."

It was more than Anya had expected. Almost as much as she needed.

She picked up the phone and called Johnny, while her hands began making adjustments on the board in the little dome, now again drawing a trickle of power. "Johnny, we can just about

make it when the bombs get here. Get the men out here—they may have a chance, if it works."

"Already ordered them out; nothing more I can do here." He shouted something, and turned back. "You were right, Two-Dots!"

She yelled before he could hang up. "Johnny. You damned idiot. Get yourself here too; you can't come in when the power's on."

But he'd hung up, in spite of her yell. She watched the mesh drawing together—she'd laced all the main lines; only the detail work for Wilma and Diane remained, together with the heavy labor for the men. They were working now—and a line of people came running across the surface of the crater from the cave.

Ten minutes more, and her controls were beginning to shape up. There'd be no time to balance this out—it had to be right at first, and with too little power.

Once it was set up, it would draw little enough—so that she could keep it going, even if the big generator went. It was building the screen that took power. But she might have trouble getting it up.

She rang for Johnny again, but got no answer.

Two minutes! Her controls were almost set. She was sending preliminary bursts of power out through the strands as soon as they were finished. Now the mesh was done, and the women were scrambling back madly, with the men just behind them. It wouldn't be safe at the edge of the field.

And the power on her meters went up suddenly, just as she saw a space-suited figure burst from the powerhouse cave and begin charging across the field. Johnny, the fool!

She saw him leap the mesh, just as her minimum estimate came; she waited five seconds longer, and threw down the main switch.

Something blue crackled into being above the telescope, and swinging in a half-dome around it. But it wasn't



right—it wasn't steady; it wouldn't turn aside a bullet!

Then Anya saw the trouble—out where the last welds had been made. One was spitting. She cut the switch back, and grabbed for a welder, to realize they were still out on the field.

A figure ran out wildly, picking one of them up, along with the extension phone that went straight through to her. "Keep your suit cool, kid! I can still run a welder!"

She'd known it was Johnny; he had to make the grand gesture. And yet, it made sense—he was still nearest the screen, and he *did* know how to handle the torch.

She saw his back jerk savagely as he tossed the pry-bar into the mess and heaved on it. It was a main trunk, almost impossible for one man to handle; but it bent under his heaving muscles. He slapped the welder to it, coolly, not trying to hurry it. He knew his business, and there had never been any question of his nerve.

She watched, dancing inside her suit, making low sounds that she didn't even realize were coming from her, until the phones sputtered. "Take it easy, grandmother; you'll last longer. I'm getting there."

"Johnny," she said. He made no answer, and she hoped he hadn't heard that—too much had been riding on it.

Then he flipped the torch away, and held the phone extension out, wiggling it. "Let her rip, kid! And do it fast—I can see them coming!"

Her hands darted down, and stopped; he was right at the edge of the field. "*Anya!*" His voice broke like a parade-drill order.

**S**HE THREW the switch, running out of the dome as she did so. She stood there, watching the blue snap into perfect existence on all sides—and seeing yellow fire spring up around Johnny—so bright that he seemed to be reflected from the plastic of her helmet and to register on the edge of the dome. He was running,

but it was seconds before he could get far enough for the flame to disappear.

Above, the bombs were striking, making long, sweeping paths against the screen as they touched it.

She stood there, frozen, feeling a million parts of her spread out. Behind her lay the big telescope, and there were threads of herself around it. But they went on up, to a tiny world and a smaller satellite that lay almost touching. The bits of herself spread around them, wrapping them up, like tinsel around a Christmas present—holding them together, keeping them from splitting in the mad chaos of war.

One of her goals was finished. There would be no war, so long as the moon could protect itself; every one of those bombs would be pulled to the screen, and be wasted there.

Women—Anya wasn't too sure she cared, now. When the time came for them to go out to the planets, no military minds would stop them. Until then—they'd be creatures like her—colder and tougher than men, but without the inner strength that gave men pleasure in fighting against nature.

Johnny—she saw him, still healthy, still the great leader of men, with the others gathered admiringly about him. He could brag and swagger now. And she'd never tell him what had happened.

She watched the last of the bombs go into a blazing and purposeless death. The scope had showed no more coming—and there were none, she was sure. Whatever nation had made them wouldn't have held such bombs in reserve—they'd have sent all they could, to be sure.

She cut the dome-shaped screen off, letting the power drain into the ground conductors. Later, she'd have to set up small counterfields to serve as safe-ports, where men could come through without harm; then the dome could be left above the telescope at all times. It shone bluely, now, but she could make it colorless, once she  
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Men  
were  
riding  
pterodactyls  
and  
dropping  
bombs.



# THEY SHALL RISE

Second In A Series  
Of Feature Novelets  
Of The Great Legend

By Wallace West

Prince Tera f  
thought he'd learned the password to  
a secret meeting of revolutionaries  
too easily. And when he found out  
how right he was, it was too late . . .



*In the first place, they dug out of the earth whatever was to be found there, mineral as well as metal, and that which is now only a name and was then something more than a name, orichalcum, was dug out of the earth....*

*Plato's "Critias."*

THE ONCE-LOVELY, canal-ringed city of Atlan, capital of all the earth, was digging itself out of its ruins, looking the while like some drab arising from a night's sleep in the gutter. Red-haired, barrel-chested Martians; Cretans; blond barbarians from Scythia and the north-land; and the handsome golden Alphas, born of interplanetary miscegenation, labored shoulder to shoulder, clearing the broad streets of burned bodies and weightier debris. Absent only were the frowning, dark-browed Egyptians. At the command of their savage pharaoh,



these had taken advantage of last night's earthquake to touch off the first revolt against Martian rule since it had been established in the fertile Mediterranean Valley a century before. Defeated by the superior technology of the aliens, those Egyptians were either dead or decamped.

One arm in a sling, but otherwise his usual debonair self, Teraf the Alpha, Crown Prince of Hellas and liege of Zeus Pitar, picked his way among fallen stone and broken glass, toward an early-morning conference at the palace. He had risen at dawn, left his sumptuous quarters and circled the town, studying the damage in the light of his civil engineering knowledge. Now, on his return journey, he found himself held up while a crew of army-engineers completed a temporary bridge across the First Canal, which separated the city proper from the palace grounds.



He had been fidgeting around the bridgehead for half an hour, giving gratuitous advice to which nobody paid the slightest attention, when a drawling voice at his elbow made him jump. "Great Land of Nod, Prince! Are you really back on your paws?"

It belonged to Hermes, reporter of the *Atlan Evening Planet*.

"Three paws, at least," Teraf grinned at the lanky young Martian who had virtually haunted him since the prince's ship had landed at the Atlan spaceport the day before. "A tree fell on me during the earthquake last night."

"Likely story," yawned the reporter, idly swinging the swagger-stick he affected; "a tree named Refo, wasn't it?"

"A tree named Teraf will impinge on your nose-for-news if you don't keep it out of my personal affairs."

"Excuse me, prince," said Hermes, not meaning it in the least. "None of my business, really, if the palace grapevine is buzzing with the story that you and your brother King Refo of Hellas, fought a duel over that cute Egyptian princess—just before all hell broke loose last night. The rumor's around you tried to seduce the little hellcat."

Teraf swung. Hermes lifted his stick; the Hellene's fist was stopped in mid-blow, his arm paralyzed.

"Journalistic privilege," said the reporter. "One meets so many aggressive characters. Shall we forget it and start over? Or would you prefer to have both of your arms in slings?"

Ten years previously, a young and prouder prince would probably have died from shame if he had been subjected to such an indignity. But Teraf's schooling on Mars not only had polished away much of the crudity of his Alpha upbringing, but had made him understand the almost pathological distaste which Martians had for violent physical contact. So, after raging helplessly for half a minute, he relaxed and grinned lopsidedly. "Turn it off, Hermes," he said; "I'll be good."

"Let's be getting along, then; the bridge is passable." Hermes flicked the switch and allowed the Hellene to assuage his hurt pride by preceding him stiffly across the makeshift structure.

**BY THE TIME** they arrived at the palace, atop its high, crooked hill, a swarm of terrestrial laborers had effaced nearly all evidence of the earthquake—except the cracks in the marble walls, floors and walkways. Even the fallen pillars in the reception hall had been patched or replaced. In one respect the room looked more attractive than it had the previous evening, when it had been the scene of



a reception preceding the annual sacrifice on the altars of those old Titan deities, Gaea and Uranus. The great comet had not yet risen in the eastern sky, so that eerie play of double shadows had not started.

Zeus, the gouty Pitar—or governor—of earth, and his plump, ubiquitous consort, Hera, already were seated on their twin golden thrones, awaiting the lesser rulers of Atlan. The Pitar had aged markedly during the night, but his voice boomed with confidence—real or assumed—as he greeted the Hellene. “You did Atlan and Mars an unforgettable service in exposing your brother’s traitorous plotting with Pharaoh Plu Toh Ra,” he said, limping forward and slipping an arm around the other’s shoulders.

“But... How?... I didn’t...” Teraf glanced at Hermes with murder in his eyes.

“Refo has been ordered to abdicate,” the Pitar continued, as though there had been no interruption. “He has been given two weeks in which to come back to Atlan and surrender; if he does not appear, you will be crowned in his place and given the unpleasant task of going to Athens to find him and bring him back.”

“No!” Teraf gasped. “No, your Pitarship. I can’t...”

“There is no alternative,” said Zeus quietly. “Take your seat, now; the Council is meeting in a few minutes. You are to attend.”



Ares, the pale-eyed warlord, appeared first, resplendent in new campaign-harness; then came Vulcan, the great engineer, looking like a kindly vulture. Heracles turned his mighty shoulders slightly in order to get them through the door; stately Athena brought up the rear.

“Hermes, the chronicler, is here because he has a habit of unearthing information which should be kept

secret,” Zeus began after he had brought the meeting together by rapping with his jagged sceptre. “Nothing must be published about what is said here; understood?”

The reporter sighed and put away his recording-machine as the Pitar added. “I have requested the Martian Anarchiate at Minos to send us the reinforcements needed to bring Egypt to heel. The reply has come that three ships are being despatched; they should arrive next month.

“Second,” continued the governor, “Vulcan tells me that an engineer named Andus, and a quantity of radioactive orichalcum have disappeared from the Bab El power-station. The quantity missing is insufficient to interfere with the operation of our machines, our communications with the home planet or the charging of our weapons. It is sufficient to blow Atlan to bits.”

“Impossible, your Pitarship,” blurted Hermes. “Only persons bearing your personal seal can leave the storage vaults at Bab El, without being searched.”

“Not impossible.” The Pitar tugged at his long beard. “It means there is a traitor in the palace.”

Automatically, the chronicler half-rose from his chair, enroute to the nearest vision-screen with his scoop; then he grimaced and relaxed.

“The third matter before this Council,” Zeus continued, concealing a faint smile at Hermes’ discomforture, “is a report on yesterday’s uprising, steps taken to prevent its recurrence, and the attitude of the ten kingdoms. Ares will discuss the first two points, and Athena the latter.”

“Beg to report,” snapped the minister of war, as he lunged to his feet and hitched at his uncomfortable trappings, “city quiet. Five thousand revolutionists killed; twelve thousand wounded; five hundred minor leaders arrested; hundred twenty-three soldiers and loyal civilians killed;



wounded one thousand. Morale of army perfect, though munitions low." He looked down his beaked nose at the Pitar. "Temporary bridges will be completed by tomorrow."

**A**THERNA, her fine face drawn by a sleepless night, rose in his stead. The morning sun made of her soft white hair an aureole about a face beautiful in spite of its high cheek-bones, widely-spaced eyes and almost abnormally high forehead.

"The colonies, with the exception of Egypt and Hellas, are faithful to Atlan," she said softly. "Due to the fact that the loyal kingdom of Arabia lies between the two seceding territories, there seems little chance of the latter joining in an effective attack.

"Refo does not realize what he's doing, I'm sure; he is completely under the domination of the Pharaoh, who has played upon the Hellene's imagination. Now Refo thinks he is a demi-god, sent to re-establish the old religions and lead the Titans back to a Golden Age—which, alas, never existed. He needs disciplining."

"He'll be disciplined all right," grunted Zeus. "Prince Teraf will be crowned king of Hellas, two weeks from today." Seeing an agonized look on Hermes' face, he added with a grin. "All right, boy; that's one story you can break, but stick around until the meeting's over. Continue, Athena."

"Phu Toh Ra, unlike Refo, is entirely evil," his daughter went on, gavely; "he has listened too long to whispers by the priests of Sais. He has also become a little mad, I think, and should be killed. Refo is his tool and Pan Doh Ra his unwilling captive; the daughter is a Martian at heart, however, and is beloved by her people. She would make an excellent ruler of Egypt."

"I always said," beamed Hera as she laid her knitting in her ample lap, "that Pan was a sweet girl. Why I remember, once, when..."

"Hera, Hera," groaned the Pitar. "Can't you let Athena finish?"

"Well of all things! I was just..." For once the Pitaress subsided, clicking her needles viciously.

"As for the outlying colonies of Africa, Asia and the Western Hemisphere," the secretary resumed, "all is quiet in those places at present. I would not, however, recommend the recall of any troops from the colonies, now that we are being reinforced from Mars."

She sat down and the Pitar looked at the others present, but all remained silent.

"I need more information," he grumbled at last. "This theft of orichalcum worries me."

"Hermes, here, is reputed to be able to make a sphinx talk; I intend to ask the editor of the *Planet* to release him to me for secret-service work. Teraf is just back from Mars and should be able to notice things which we overlook as a matter of course; I think he should work with Hermes."

"Don't you think we should declare martial law?" Heracles' voice boomed out like thunder.

Mars nodded vigorously but Zeus shook his head. "The barbarians are but scantily equipped with infra-heat guns," the latter explained patiently. "Their air-forces are negligible, being mainly merchant ships without arms. Vulcan has disconnected the tight beam from Bab El to Hellas and Egypt, so that neither of the seceding states can operate any machinery using radio-power. That should cause the revolutionists to capitulate within a short time, without the inconvenience of martial law... Any other suggestions?... If not, the meeting is adjourned."





*...and there were many temples built and dedicated to many gods; also gardens and places of exercise, some for men, and some set apart for horses in both of the two islands formed by the zones; and in the centre of the larger of the two there was a race-course of a stadium in width and in length allowed to extend all around the island, for horses to race in.*

*Plato's "Critias."*

**T**ERAF SPENT the next two weeks wandering about the streets of Atlan, his face stained brown and his flaming hair covered by an Arabian burnoose. In his youth, he had made many trips into that land to purchase blooded horses; he knew the language, and traditions of the inhabitants, fairly well.

Due to the fact that Arabia lay between the seceding kingdoms, the prince represented himself as trembling in the balance between allegiance to Atlan and to the Egyptians, and was able to gather some information of value.

He found the Titans—or original inhabitants of the Mediterranean basin—fairly well satisfied with Martian rule. The younger generation, which had been largely trained in Martian schools, considered itself a part of the ruling class and were working heart and soul for its preservation. But their elders—though they took advantage of every advance in civilization provided by their conquerors—talked of the good old days (which nobody really remembered), muttered about the disrespect with which the Martians looked upon nature worship, (although they themselves seldom entered the temples) and looked upon the burst comet as a sign of ill-omen. Evidently, a long propaganda-campaign had been conducted among them by Plu Toh Ra's agents, to undermine their confidence in the government.

It was among the new barbarian

population, which had been brought in to meet demands for labor created by the constantly-expanding empire, that revolt stalked red-eyed and defiant. Although cowed by the ease with which their "oppressors" had won the first skirmish, Teraf could see that those hordes of half-civilized warlocks from western and northern Europe were merely awaiting another opportunity.

The prince spent part of his time investigating the tower of Bab El, seeking some clue to the orichalcum theft. The power station fascinated him as of old; its atomic pile and throbbing machinery seemed the very heart and soul of Atlantis. Its antennae pumped electric power into the ether as gas is forced into a balloon. Properly attuned receiving apparatus could tap this power all over the earth, precisely as one might prick a balloon with a pin and withdraw a stream of gas.

The system had the disadvantage of being vulnerable to aerial attack, but it had been found extremely useful in a loosely-knit empire, where colonies were often separated from the mother-country by stormy seas, deserts or savage tribes. Except for disciplinary reasons, they could not be cut off from the boundless supply of radio-power; with it, they, also, could operate their air freight and passenger-ships, and be in constant communication with Atlan.

This power was generated from orichalcum, in lead-lined vaults underlying the 800-foot tower. It was in these vaults that Vulcan brooded like a genie, hobbling about the gloomy passageways, darting into rooms which purred with shining machinery and quarreling ferociously and constantly with his staff.

"Isn't she a beauty," the engineer crooned one day, when Teraf came upon him caressing a transmitter as though it had been a woman. "A million-kilowatt capacity—enough to turn half the wheels on Mars itself. And



earth uses only a paltry half-million kilowatts."

He escorted the prince into a great vault where orichalcum was stored in hardened lead containers, each of which weighed a hundred pounds. "It just couldn't be done," he muttered; "no one could carry out one of those shells under our very noses. He would have needed a truck."

"Couldn't the thief have drilled a hole through one of the containers and extracted the contents?" ventured Teraf.

"And get a mortal radiation burn doing so." The crippled Vulcan scratched his hump nervously. "Oh, it could be done, of course, if one were fool enough; let's look."

A CAREFUL examination of the chamber convinced them that Teraf's guess had been correct; a heap of lead shavings was found on the floor, and one container was pierced by a tiny hole.

"Some utter idiot did it," fumed the little engineer. "Carried the stuff off in a thin lead container, which could give him practically no protection. He's dead by this time, damn him; he should be—robbing us when we're so short of atomic fuel."

Teraf hurried to the palace with his news and ran into Hermes, who had made another important discovery. The latter believed he had the password used by Titan revolutionaries, and their barbarian allies, for secret meetings.

"*'Scrolling'* is the word," declared Hermes. "It means some sort of particularly-smelly savage, and is the worst insult possible. Twice this week I've socked barbs on the jaw when they used the term on me. Saw the light today when one Norseman called another a scrolling; instead of battering each other to pulp, they thereupon shook hands and went arm-in-arm to the nearest saloon.

"Seems almost too simple," grumbled Zeus when he had heard their reports. "Vulcan isn't accustomed to hiring utter idiots at Bab El, in the first place. As for the password," he tugged thoughtfully at his beard, "I don't trust it."

"But it's worth trying!" Hermes was boiling. "We can't just sit here and wait for..."

"I know, I know; go down into town and try it out. But take the prince along, just in case you run into trouble."

So it was that, a few hours later, Teraf found himself seated on a stone bench at the race-track which was the pride of Atlan, and the marvel of her barbarian inhabitants. These could not understand the science of the Martians, but they certainly appreciated their wonderful horseflesh.

Here the immigrant workers, most of whom lived in the many "Strangers' Homes" which abounded in the city, congregated on holidays and after work. One of these outlanders, evidently a Norseman, sat beside the Hellene now. The barbarian picked his teeth with a long knife while he surveyed the racing with lackluster eyes and made derogatory remarks about the horses and their jockeys.

"Yes, we have much better horses in Arabia, my native land," Teraf agreed with his neighbor.

"Horses interest me little," yawned the Norseman, tossing long braids of dirty yellow hair back over his shoulders. "Boats are my choice. And if yon cursed red-men had not swooped upon me from the skies, when my galley was peaceably raiding the British coast, I would be at sea, now—instead of watching this stinking show."

About them, the crowd was on its feet, yelling as some favorite came down the stretch, but the barbarian scarcely deigned to glance at the track.

"Definitely second rate," agreed Teraf, despite the fact that he had



won a hundred credits on the race. "You say you once raided Britain. Tell me..."

UNDER HIS prodding, the barbarian waxed loquacious; he boasted of wild pirating-expeditions along the northern coasts, of battles where the decks ran with blood, of the women he had stolen and the men he had slaughtered.

"And now," he mourned at last, "I have become a mere trader in furs and tin, because the red-men have found that I know the north countries. A purchasing-agent, they call me. Bah!" And he spat on a lizard which had crept from under the grandstand to sun itself.

"But don't you have more gold in your pockets than in the old days?"

"Gold! I haven't seen a piece of good yellow gold since I reached Atlan; they give me little pieces of paper for my hard work." He dragged a big handful of credits out of his baggy trousers and sneered at them. "Oh, for the wild times, when we could raid a Celtic town, fight from sunup to sundown and come away with the holds of our ships crammed with real gold and the cabins with pretty, sobbing women. Then we could return to our fjords and live like kings for half a year."

"And wind up dead broke at the end of that time."

"Well, what of that?" The Norsemen dug at his molars with the knife as if to uproot them. "Weren't there other cities? Now I have to fly about in magic boats and chaffer with stinking traders whose goods I used to take without a by-your-leave. How they laugh at me. I tell you there's no future in this business."

"Why, when all is said and done, you're no better than a Scrolling," cried Teraf, heart in mouth.

The barbarian's face lighted up; he put away the knife and faced about. "You'll be at the meeting tonight?" he asked, tugging at one of his greasy braids.

"Why, uh, I've been out of town; I haven't received any notice of a meeting." Teraf wondered if he should have a braid to tug.

"It's at the old place...the East Catacombs," growled the Northman as he rose to depart. "I'll see you there...brother." He walked away, treading with grim delight on the toes of other spectators.

Teraf and Hermes attended the meeting together, after the chronicler had disguised himself as best he could, by swathing his great chest in a heavy woolen burnoose, and staining his face brown. They had a general idea of where they were going; the catacombs—or at least the entrances to them—were among the showplaces of Atlan.

These caverns were relics of a day long before the Martian invasion, when the capital had been a religious center known as "The City of Golden Gates" built around the Gaic Oracle. Monasteries had flourished there, and the great of the pre-historic earth had been brought by thousands for burial in the sacred precincts.

It was into the only one of these caverns located on the eastern side of town that Hermes led the way. The entrance masqueraded as a grotto, in a small park in the business-circle. It was only after muttering their password through a tiny hole in a blank stone wall that a panel slid aside to reveal a flight of slippery, deeply rutted stone steps.

Feeling their way in the darkness, which was partially lit at long intervals by smoking torches, they came at last to the meeting place—a vast arched chamber, the walls of which were lined with crypts. Many of the latter had been rifled; from some protruded reminders of their contents...a grisly clutching hand, a grinning cranium or a shamelessly-exposed thigh-bone. The air was fetid and stifling, while the long shadows



flung by the torches made the half-exposed skeletons dance a ghastly rigadon.



THE MEETING evidently had been in progress for some time. A young man of decidedly Egyptian cast of countenance, but dressed in the leather shirt and baggy trousers of a Norseman, was haranguing 500 or so onlookers from a dust-covered altar in the center of the flag-paved floor. As the two spies entered he was jeering at his audience's meek submission to the "red invaders" and painting a picture of revolt which drew yells of enthusiasm.

Yet, despite his eloquence, he spoke in generalities; there were no plans, or names of leaders, mentioned. The Egyptian seemed merely striving to arouse the blood-lust of those present. At last he sat down, amidst wild cheers and the clashing of swords; such weapons, though their wearing had been forbidden since the first outbreak, were evident in large numbers.

Teraf started, and gripped Hermes' arm, when the Egyptian was succeeded at the altar by his tooth-picking Norse acquaintance. The hulking expirate was still at it, though this time he was using an oversized splinter of wood. For several moments he leaned over the block of granite, letting his eyes roam casually over the gathering as though considering what he should say.

"I was afraid we wouldn't have a full meeting...after we changed the password so suddenly yesterday," he drawled at last. "However, I see you're all here. Also," he spat out the splinter, "I see we caught two Martians spies with the trick." His voice rose to a yell. "They're the ones by the door in Arabian costume; grab

'em!" He leaped over the altar and charged, sword in hand.

The speaker's desire to work up a dramatic effect saved the intruders; before the onlookers grasped the meaning of his words, Teraf and Hermes had elbowed their way through the outer ring of onlookers and were dashing down the corridor.

It was not the passage through which they had entered, however; that was shut off by several stalwart guards. But another ran off into utter darkness in an opposite direction and they chanced that.

"One up for the revolutionists," laughed the reporter as they ran, stumbling over bones which littered the floor. "We'd better separate at the next intersection; that will throw them off. There are plenty of shafts, leading to the surface, which we can find when daylight comes."

They dashed on, bruising themselves against the tilted stone doors of the crypts, stepping on skulls which rolled and threw them sickeningly, panting in the vile dust which their footsteps stirred up.

Behind them the cries grew louder as their pursuers, snatching torches from the walls, picked up the trail. Soon the leaders of the pack were only yards behind; a well-flung stone caught Teraf in the shoulder and spun him round, but he kept on.

The roar of shouts became deafening in the narrow tunnel. To make things worse, several of their pursuers started an old wolf-hunting chant.

"We're done for...unless we strike a branch in the tunnel," gasped Hermes; "their lights let them make better speed than we can."

As he spoke there came a high bell-ing note close behind; it was the "view halloa" of a fleet-footed runner who had almost overtaken them.

WITHOUT breaking his stride, Teraf snatched a skull from an open crypt and huried it with terrific force; the barbarian went down,



his sword skittering along the floor almost within their reach.

Then, when their lungs seemed cracking, the passage branched; without hesitation, Hermes took the right angle, and Teraf the left. The pursuit hesitated at the intersection, giving them a moment of respite.

But the prince was exhausted; his legs moved like broken sticks and his lungs screamed for pure air. In the darkness, he reeled against a wall and thrust out an arm for support. His hand plunged several feet among the bones and dust of a rifled tomb.

A way out flashed through his mind; slowly he dragged his weary limbs over the edge of the niche as torches again began moving toward him. By their dim reflection, he saw that the vault was occupied by an almost complete skeleton; he threw himself down behind it and rubbed the inch-thick dust over his burnoose in an effort to camouflage its stark whiteness. "Sorry to disturb you," he panted as he wriggled and turned to make himself as flat as possible. "There's a housing-shortage, you know."

With a roar the pack approached, torches gleaming red in his eyes as Teraf peered between a skull and shoulderblade, sword in hand for a last hopeless fight. But the barbarians swept by, without a glance at the crypt—one of the thousands housed in the tunnel. Their blood-lust was up, swords shaking above blond heads, their braids streaming so ridiculously behind them that Teraf had difficulty restraining a laugh.

Realizing, far down the corridor, that they had lost the trail, they began casting back and forth through the maze of tunnels for their victims. Teraf even made out that they started searching the crypts, but this soon was given up—too many crypts. After that, the pursuers contented themselves with wandering back and forth for hours.

Once, the fugitive thought he heard

confused shouting in the distance and trembled to think Hermes had been taken; at another time the dust got into his nostrils and caused a violent fit of sneezing. But again the vast number of death cubicles saved him. After several hours the chase gradually died away; by the time Teraf's watch showed that it was morning, the catacombs had regained their ancient stillness.

Cramped and stiff, he at last chanced creeping from his hiding place. Some whim made him try to rearrange the bones which he had disturbed, but they crumbled under his touch.

**THEN** BEGAN a long, wearying search for the exit. Teraf dared not return to the cavern where the meeting had taken place, and wandered four hours in the darkness. Dust got into his parched throat and choked him; bones and fallen stones tripped him cruelly.

It must have been towards noon when he discerned light ahead; when he reached it, he found the tunnel had dipped and was blocked by a sheet of water—evidently part of one of the circular canals. Light was shining through this, however, indicating that liberty could not be far away.

Taking a long breath, Teraf dived and swam until his lungs were bursting. At last he came up, fearful that his head would strike a ceiling of stone. Luck was with him; he just cleared the end of the tunnel to attain the air and sunshine of the outer world.

Dripping like a half-drowned rat, he crawled ashore and hurried through amused crowds until he found an aerial taxi which carried him to the palace. Not stopping to change clothes, he dashed to the audience chamber to report the probable death of Hermes.

When he was admitted into the



Pitaric presence it was to find the debonair chronicler, freshly tubbed and clothed, seated in his old attitude on the small of his back, feet cocked upon the window sill and glass in hand. "Great Land of Nod," chortled Hermes as he leaped to his feet. "Now I won't have to get drunk to commemorate your demise. Where have you been?"

"Don't be flip," growled the Hellene. "I come in here all broken up to report your death and what do I find you doing...?"

"Having a drink to drown my sorrow over your death; what's wrong about that? Let's have another to celebrate our return from the dead."

"Come, come, boys," snapped Zeus. "What happened to you, Teraf?"

Shamefacedly the prince explained.

"Did the same thing myself," chuckled Hermes, "but I had sense enough to sneak out the passage on the heels of the last of our charming playfellows. There has been a relief expedition searching for you for hours. Didn't you hear us shouting? Heracles, who is in charge, finally ordered me back to the palace for a rest."

"Well, in that case..." Teraf found his anger melting.

"And I didn't get a single name," wailed the reporter as he refilled his glass.



*Saw the heavens fill with commerce,  
argosies of magic sails;  
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping  
down with costly bales.  
Heard the heavens fill with shouting,  
and there rained a ghastly dew  
From the nations' airy navies grap-  
pling in the central blue;*

Tennyson's "Locksley Hall."

CORONATION DAY for the new king of Hellas approached with no sign of a change of heart by Refo; the outlawed ruler mocked at messengers sent from Atlan with demands for his abdication. They were returned under military escort, with many presents, bearing advice to Zeus as to the best method of conducting a sortie into the wild Greek mountains.

Plu Toh Ra did not bother to return messengers sent with a similar message to Sais; he sent back only their ears.

Meanwhile both sides in the struggle marked time. The Martians waited for the promised reinforcements, while Hellenes and Egyptians contented themselves with border-raids, calculated to excite their warriors with a taste of loot. Mars fumed and fretted about those raids but had sense enough not to advocate weakening the defenses of Atlan by trying to stop them.

The coronation was being planned by Hera, who determined to make the affair so impressive it would awe the barbarians into submission. The streets of Atlan were draped in bunting and banners; the serving staff at the palace had been augmented. Dr. Vanya, in his role of high priest, had ordered new robes; his assistants ceased their labors in the gardens and practiced rituals or incantations by the hour. And, because Refo showed no signs of surrendering the ancient jade crown of Hellas, artisans and engravers of the court were busy creating an even more astounding diadem for his successor.

Teraf surveyed the creation in the shop of a palace lapidary. He felt honored by the confidence which Zeus had in him; at the same time, it seemed as if he was betraying his brother. He forgot the fanatic he had met upon his return from Mars and remembered, instead, the boy—only three years older than himself—with



whom he had played among the blue mountains of Thessaly.

He saw again, in memory, the day when he and Refo, while hunting, had been attacked by a saber-tooth tiger; Teraf had stepped into a crevice in the rocks and broken his ankle. He'd watched Refo, black hair flying in the mountain wind, standing across his body, defying the beast with a puny sword in one hand and what appeared to be an equally-important energy-pistol in the other.

Those and other things, some amazing, some heroic, Teraf remembered as he stared down at the priceless crown.

"Put it away," he said.



Again the white palaces blazed with lights; again the aristocracy of Atlantis moved through the spacious halls, as on the night of Teraf's return. But, whereas that ceremony had begun with gaiety, there was a sense of strain—almost of furtiveness—about the coronation, despite the efforts of the musicians and a plentiful supply of nectar.

The barbarians were conspicuous by their absence; only natives of Atlan were present on this occasion, when, for the first time since the invasion, one king was to be degraded and another raised to his place. True, there was laughter and dancing; the cool skins of the women and the trappings of the men shone as brilliantly as before. But Martians and Alphas regarded each other with a faint tinge of uncertainty and Zeus cast few approving glances at pretty girls.

**I**N HIS CHAMBERS, Teraf was being prepared for the occasion. His curly red hair was oiled, and drawn tightly about his head with a silver band; he was obliged to don the long, flowing robes of state and the clumsy, thick-soled buskins which had been worn by Hellenic kings since they

hewed their way from their Aryan birthplace.

The prince was puffing nervously on a last cigarette before making his entrance into the reception hall when the door swung open and Hermes thrust himself through the attendants.

"I'll bet you had more fun hiding behind that skeleton," he grinned, as he seated himself on the arm of a chair and reached for the inevitable glass: "Want to talk to you alone a moment. I have a hot tip."

As Teraf waved the attendants away, the reporter snapped: "Where has Aphrodite been these last two weeks?"

"How should I know? I haven't seen her since the night of the conclave. Hadn't thought about her since."

"Don't let her hear you say that," chuckled Hermes. Then, in a more serious tone. "She has been 'lost' since the conclave; and that was the night of the orichalcum's disappearance, if you recall. Sent word from Crete that she was taking the baths there. (She needs them, poor girl, at the rate she's going). But I checked with our correspondent at Gnosus. She was in Crete all right, but left ten days ago; and today she returns here, looking more done up than usual. How do you figure it?"

"Good Chronus, man! You don't suspect Aphrodite of taking the orichalcum?"

"Well, she has access to the Pitaric seal; and you know her power over men—especially young ones. Don't forget there are plenty of young engineers at Bab El."

"But what could be her purpose? It sounds mad to me."

At that moment, the vision-screen clicked imperatively and Vanya announced that the coronation ceremonies were about to begin. "More about this later," said Hermes as he hopped to his feet and patted Teraf on the back. "Meanwhile, be a good king."

The ceremony was as impressive as



the Martians, who secretly despised such occasions, could contrive to make it. Brave music played; changing, vari-colored lights wove a net of mystery over the silent crowded hall. To a blare of trumpets, Teraf padded in, flanked on all sides by chanting, censor-swinging priests in flowing garments of white and gold.

Approaching the throne, the prince knelt clumsily, with the assistance of two of his escorts and received the Pitaric blessing.

Then Zeus rose and, bending forward, rapped Teraf on the shoulder with his zig-zag sceptre. Through some electrical hocus-pocus, the thing flashed with blinding colors at the contact. "Rise, King of Hellas," cried the Pitar in a great voice which shook the hangings, "and receive your crown at the hands of Vanya, high priest of Gaea and Uranus."

Hampered by the buskins, Teraf rose—with as much dignity as possible—and bowed his head for the weight of the crown. A querulous doctor no longer, but minion of a power in which he still subconsciously believed, Vanya stepped forward—supporting with difficulty that poem in green stone.



**H**ARDLY had he taken three steps when concussion shook the palace; the entire company in the audience chamber was hurled to the floor. A column collapsed, bringing with it a shower of marble, which killed or maimed many of the panic-stricken guests.

Vanya fought to retain his footing, but despite his frantic efforts the jade crown flew from his hands and burst into a thousand sparkling fragments about Teraf's feet. Then the lights blinked out.

"An earthquake!" shouted some.

"The barbarians attack!" screamed others.

"Bab El is burning. Bab El is on fire!" a man who stood near the windows roared above the clamor.

Teraf fought his way through that mass of mad, squirming humanity and reached a door. Staring upward, he saw the great steel tower of Bab El blazing as though it had been made of pine. As he watched, the tower bent slowly; there, like a falling tree, it hung over the mountainside as the impossible glow about it subsided.

After long minutes, the palace lights flickered on dimly while heat-reflectors from the military section began to sweep the sky, although with only a fraction of their usual brilliance.

Teraf, and others who had managed to fight their way into the open, stared stunned at what the reflectors revealed... a flight of monstrous birds circling over the city. From them were dropping bombs which set fire to anything they touched, even the marble of warehouses and palaces.

"Pterodactyls! The Egyptians are upon us!" shrieked the throng, as it dashed about aimlessly. "Fly for your lives; Atlan is destroyed."

But another flight of "birds" was rising slowly from the military circles. This one was composed of the smaller fighting-ships of Atlan; apparently, enough power still was being radiated by Bab El to lift them into the air. But they were slow, their anti-grav motors working sluggishly.

Even in their crippled condition, however, the Atlan ships were more than a match for pterodactyls, which were capable of carrying but one man against the airships' ten or fifteen. Realizing their disadvantage, riders of the winged reptiles wheeled their mounts low over the palaces, dropped the last of their bombs, and swept into the night with a thunder of leathery wings.

Here and there a gun would flash from one of the closely-pursuing ships and a pterodactyl, with an ear-split-



ting squeal, would fold its wings and drop like a stone.

Then, as complete victory seemed in the grasp of the Martians, the tower atop the crooked mountain reeled on its melting supports and collapsed with a roar.

Teraf watched the ships with fascination. For a time they hovered, uncertainly, and a few made quick landings from low altitudes. But those high in the air were not so fortunate; as the power drained from the ether they started falling—slowly at first, the luminous paint of their hulls making lurid trails against the sky. Then, with terrific speed they plunged downward, lighted from beneath by the burning city.

One struck on the lawn of the palace and burst like an egg, hurling maimed and dead occupants in all directions. Teraf covered his eyes and was sick as succeeding crashes told of the fate of most of Atlan's aerial navy.



*At the head of the Egyptian Delta, where the River Nile divides, there is a certain district which is called the district of Sais, and the great city of the district is also called Sais.*

*Plato's "Timaeus."*

**T**ERAF was aroused from his stupor when someone shook him violently. It was Hermes, his face streaming with blood as he babbled insanely of scoops and extras.

"The vision screens aren't working," the chronicler screamed above the uproar, all his sang-froid forgotten. "I have been too heavy for the 'dactyls' story. But," he waved vaguely toward the mountain, "I saw one of those damned snakes fall over there; it seemed only crippled. Maybe you can catch the rider and get some informa-

tion. Zeus said go after him. Gotta go now... write story minimizing damages and all that rot. Luck!" Hermes flung the last word over his shoulder as he started a staggering run down the path toward the nearest bridge.

His teeth gritted in fury, Teraf started a mad race up the mountain-side; he, too, remembered having seen a giant shape flutter to the ground near the end of the garden.

In the dim glare of burning Atlan, the paths were unfamiliar. Teraf stumbled through hedges, crashed into age-old trees and finally lost himself completely; out of breath he halted and listened.

At first he heard nothing, then a faint sobbing reached him—apparently straight ahead. Thanking his stars that the pocket-gun he gripped was unaffected by the collapse of Bab El, he moved forward, stealthily. Either the pterodactyl's rider, or an Atlantean, was badly hurt somewhere nearby.

The moaning stopped and he cast about for several minutes without success. Then it began again, behind a hedge only a few yards from where he crouched. Teraf pushed through the foliage and came upon a flying reptile, its wings outstretched like the sails of a wrecked boat, its teeth bared in a fearful grin.

For a time he watched the carcass, fearful of an attack from behind it. Then he crept forward, as the sobbing stopped once more. "You might as well surrender," he said firmly. "We have you surrounded. Where are you, Egyptian?"

"Here," gasped a voice almost at his feet. "My leg is broken; I cannot harm you."

Feeling about in the dewy grass, Teraf located the body of the rider and, after much pulling and hauling, succeeded in drawing it clear of the dead beast. Then he lifted the wounded soldier in his arms. "Kill me now and be merciful," groaned his captive.



"Oh shut up!" he commanded; "Zeus wants to see you."

The figure in his arms shuddered with another attack of sobbing. "I don't want to see him. Please kill me; I couldn't bear to have the Pitar look at me."

Unheeding, Teraf tramped back. Great fires had been lighted to aid rescue-workers; one of the palaces was in flames. Several sections of the gardens blazed unchecked, but most of that last consignment of bombs had missed their marks.

**A**S HE ENTERED the circle of firelight where the barbaric uniform of his captive could be seen, Teraf was greeted with shouts of fury.

"An Egyptian!" screamed a dishevelled fury, who but recently had been a sedate matron attending the coronation-ceremonies. "An Egyptian dog!" She shook her fists wildly above her head. "Kill him! Kill! Kill!"

As Titans, and even some Martians, crowded forward to do her bidding, Zeus strode forward, his face black with anger, his sceptre spitting flame. "By my immortal soul," thundered the Pitar. "If anyone lifts a hand, I'll strike him dead. King Teraf, put the prisoner down here by the fire; I want to question him."

None too gently, the prince placed his burden on the ground and stepped back. The Egyptian buried his face in the trampled grass and recommenced that heartbroken moaning.

"What's this?" Zeus dropped to his knees, his gout forgotten. "A mere boy. Turn over, son; nobody's going to hurt you." Gripping the captive by the shoulders, when no response was forthcoming, the Pitar lifted him so that his face was in the light.

The Pitar started back and Teraf caught his breath. Even the encircling crowd forgot its bloodlust and muttered in amazement. The flames revealed the clear-cut features of Pan Doh Ra, princess of Sais:

"By my thunderbolt," snorted the Pitar. "Pan Doh Ra! So you have betrayed us, too; carry her to my apartment, Teraf. I must talk with her alone."

In the battered royal suite, lighted now only by lanterns, the Hellene placed the girl on a divan and started to retire.

"Wait!" commanded Zeus. "Call Vanya to dress her wounds. Return with him." Then, turning to the suffering girl he sighed, "Has it come to this? Are my own people turning against me?"

"I had to do it," gasped Pan Doh Ra, sitting up and facing him squarely, though her face was drawn with pain. "You know the Pharaoh charged that Prince Teraf had disgraced me at the cave of the oracle. He swore he would place me among the vestal virgins of the goddess Neith. Oh Pitar, you can't imagine the hopeless, miserable lives those girls lead. Servants of the goddess they are called; slaves of the priests they are in reality, sealed in a chamber of horrors too awful to mention."

"I know only too well; continue, my child."



"I swore my innocence; I grovelled at his feet and begged and pleaded. Finally he agreed that if I went along on this attack he would forgive me. I was to hearten the soldiers with my divine presence." She laughed bitterly.

"Those were orichalcum bombs, weren't they?" The Pitar shifted his attack. "Where did the Pharaoh get them?"

"Oh, yes. Explosive bombs would



have been too heavy for the 'dactyls to carry. The orichalcum was stolen from Bab El, according to the soldiers. Just how I don't know; I've been locked in my rooms since I returned to Sais."

"Then you know nothing of the Pharaoh's plans?"

"Only rumors. Others in the raiding party whispered that this attack was made merely to destroy Bab El and demoralize you. Plu Toh Ra, curse him for an unnatural father, is brewing some greater devilment in collaboration with Refo of Hellas."

At this point Teraf returned with the priest-physician and the girl's examination began. She bore it bravely, although perspiration stood out on her face and she bit her lips until they were smeared with crimson.

"No broken bones," the doctor grunted at last. "Bad strain of all muscles in the left leg. She should be up and about in a few days. Numerous contusions and cuts; wonder she's not dead. Perhaps I should say a pity." Vanya took his morose departure, leaving the three together.

**Z**EUZ LIMPED to his chair and sat down with a tired groan. For a long time he stared out over the burning city, then said softly: "Are you really with us or against us, princess?"

"With you," she cried, "to the last drop of my blood. What do you want me to do to serve Atlan? I'll die willingly; how can I best help?"

"By going back to your father at Sais," replied the Pitar.

"But you can't ask her to do that," protested Teraf; "Plu Toh Ra might kill her."

"More probably he'll kill you," replied Zeus somberly; "you're going to head Pan Doh Ra's escort."

"Now wait a moment." He held up his hand as the girl protested in her turn. "Unless I'm mistaken, the Pharaoh has at least one soft spot in his black heart...that reserved for his

only daughter. Oh—I know that his sister, Medea, has great influence over him—but I doubt that he has any fondness for such a witch. He will be glad to have the princess brought back, though he may pretend differently. He can't decently kill her escort. But..." the Pitar's eyes narrowed, "her escort may just possibly succeed in killing the Pharaoh and putting an end to this ridiculous war."

"But, sir!" Teraf was flabbergasted. "What could such a few men do in the heart of Sais?"

"Plenty...perhaps...with the secret weapons which Vulcan can supply. And if they are imprisoned, some may escape and bring back valuable information...about the orichalcum, for example. I know it's a long chance, Teraf, but you are a bright lad; we'll discuss it further at the Council meeting in the morning."



*Zeus, the god of gods, who rules with law, and is able to see into such things, perceiving that an honourable race was in a woeful plight, and wanting to inflict punishment on them, that they might be chastened and improve, collected all the gods into his most holy habitation, which being placed in the center of the world, beholds all created things. And when he had called them together he spake as follows:-*

*Plato's "Timaeus"*

**"T**HE NEWS is bad," said the Pitar the next morning after Vulcan, Heracles, Ares, Athena, Apollo, Hera, Hermes, Teraf—and, last of all Aphrodite—had taken seats about the pillared Council Chamber. "Hermes, the minutes of this meeting must not be published. First of all, listen to this report from the spacer *Barthia*." He spread out a purple



heliogram on the table before him.

"Spacer *Manthus* lost with all hands approximately 45,000,000 miles out from Mars. Ran into uncharted band of extremely large meteors, a residue of the comet which recently exploded. *Manthus* riddled and drifting sunward; apparently all on board suffocated when hull punctured."

Zeus lifted a tired hand to still the babble, and continued: "Spacers *Barthia* and *Sonus*, running ten and twenty thousand miles astern of *Manthus*, pulled up in time to escape with slight damages. After intensive scouting, beg to report that spacelanes between Earth and Mars completely blocked by mass of meteoric material lying in plane of ecliptic. Standing by for orders."

"I have something to report on that," interrupted Vulcan. "The observatory checked on the meteor-band as soon as the helio was received. They say the band has established an unstable orbit—if you can call it that—midway between Earth and Mars. The orbit is expanding slowly, however, due to the fact that the comet was travelling faster than the sun's planetary system when it burst. This should mean, they say, that eventually the band will stabilize its orbit somewhere between those of Mars and Jupiter. They can't estimate how long that will take... or what will happen to Mars when its orbit coincides with that of the meteors."

"Thank you, Vulcan." The Pitar spread out another heliograph. "Here's one dated from Minos and signed by the secretary of the Anarchiate. It reads: 'Due to reports from spacers *Barthia* and *Sonus*, have ordered both return Minos immediately. No hope of salvaging *Manthus*. Doing all possible to find path to you. Courage.'

"You know what that means," the old man said calmly, as he removed his reading-glasses and swung them between finger and thumb. "The 15,000 soldiers and the supply of orichalcum cannot reach us until a

way has been found to deflect the meteors or until they change their orbit. This may require years... even centuries. Or it may happen next week."

"But can't a ship be sent over or under the meteor-band?" cried Athena.

"Unfortunately not. Our space-ships operate by means of the force of gravity between the sun and its planets and therefore can move only in the plane of the solar system; that leaves the situation strictly up to us, my friends."

The councillors still sat stunned, with the exception of Aphrodite—who, Teraf observed, yawned prettily and inspected her long red fingernails in the corner to which she had withdrawn—and Hera, who was bursting with excitement.

"I told you so," cried the plump little woman. "I had a dream two months ago about whirling suns and water. Oh, if you'd only listened to me and thunderbolted a few barbarian leaders instead of making eyes at barbarian women! I warned you..."

"Be silent, woman!" thundered the usually-meek Pitar; "this is no time for your nonsense. Vulcan, what's the situation at Bab El?"

A LOOK OF blank astonishment on her plump face, Hera subsided; in her place the hunchback rose, gripping the back of his chair until veins stood out on his gnarled, burned hands.

"We have rigged a temporary tower, through which power can be broadcast for the city of Atlan and its immediate environs," he whispered in a voice almost gone from a night spent in shouting directions to workmen up there on his mountain top. "The heliograph to Mars is working, as you know, but we haven't enough power to raise distant radio stations of the empire."

"Not bad, not bad," beamed the Pitar; "continue."

"It will take from six weeks to two months to repair the main tower; un-



til then the city can operate normally, but no airship communication can be maintained with the colonies."

Heracles waved a great paw and demanded: "Does that mean we're completely cut off from the ten nations around the Mediterranean Basin? I'd been planning to inspect my dam..." He looked hurt and puzzled, like a scolded child.

"You'll have to walk on those big feet of yours for once," piped up Aphrodite from her corner.

"Or perhaps you can find an internal-combustion motor-car in the museum," the Pitar smiled, in spite of himself. "Proceed, Vulcan."

"Bab El station, itself, suffered only slight damage; the orichalcum pile is intact. However our supply of radioactive fuel can last only a few months. As you know, ninety per cent of it was imported from Mars; our own pitchblende mines will not begin to supply the empire's demands."

He sat down amidst oppressive silence.

"And your report?" Zeus glanced at the fidgeting warlord.

"Army morale good," barked Ares. "City normal; damage extensive but repairable; can hold off any attack with present force. Pterodactyls negligible quantity since many killed in attack and we now prepared for surprise." He popped back into his seat.

"Athena, what have you to say?"

The tall secretary of colonies rose wearily, brushing the silver hair away from her high forehead. "We're in radio-communication with all parts of Atlantis proper," she began. "The eight loyal kingdoms are disorganized due to the power cut-off, but report they can carry on until Bab El is restored. Reports from Crete say that Egyptian and Hellenic raiding parties have crossed the Mediterranean Lake and are active in that vicinity." She hesitated and then added softly. "In other words, the lights are going out; but we are managing to re-light most of them—for a while, at least."

For a long time Zeus sat fingering his sceptre and staring out over his beloved Atlan. "Friends and councilors," he said at last, "we will still rekindle all the lights and save the empire. The barbarians must travel on foot, on horseback, or in extremely small numbers by pterodactyl. They have a few infra-heat guns, and apparently a supply of orichalcum with which to charge them and manufacture light bombs.

"We cannot underestimate their leadership in the light of past events, but they are in the minority. Ninety per cent of the Titans—which means almost every inhabitant of the valley, with the exception of those in Egypt and Hellas—are with us...at least so long as we keep up a good front."

**A**RES AGREED. "As things stand, we can defend Atlan; but until Bab El is restored, we can't get our ships into the air or make an attack of consequence."

"Right." The Pitar leaned forward. "At present, the key to the whole situation lies at Sais, where Plu Toh Ra holds his supply of stolen orichalcum. Princess Pan Doh Ra was captured last night; I'm going to send her back under the escort of Prince...of King Teraf and fifty of the best men in Atlan's garrison. That will put some of us behind the enemy's lines."

"That sounds awful silly to me," yawned Aphrodite. "I'm sort of fond of Teraf; I'd hate to have to look at him without any ears...or maybe any head. What on earth do you expect to accomplish by such a stunt?"

"I'm glad to see you back in the Council Chamber, daughter," answered Pitar sourly, "but perhaps you had better acquaint yourself with the situation before you begin making suggestions. I say it's worth the risk to get a few of our people into Sais. Some may be killed and some imprisoned; but I doubt that Teraf will be harmed. They may be able to pick up valuable information. However, let's



put it to a vote; all in favor of sending the King of Hellas to Egypt at the head of the escort, raise your hands."

Every hand but that of the spoiled darling of the court went up.

"Thank you." The Pitar rose carefully. "Now will you all remain here for the audience which I have arranged with our people."

Apollo leaped to the vision-screen, turned dials and pushed levers. The oval clicked and glowed as Zeus strode forward regally.

"Titans," he thundered at the machine. "This is no time to mince words; Egypt and Hellas have seceded from the empire and by sneak attack have damaged Bab El and our city."

"But the brood of filthy reptiles on which they rode were dispersed or killed by our brave fliers, crippled though they were. The attack harmed us little, and the rest of Atlantis is untouched and rallying to our aid."

"When Bab El is repaired we shall sweep over Egypt and Hellas like a plague of locusts. Until that time, be of good courage and fear nothing. If you support Atlantis, she will reward you as in the past; if you desert her, the Egyptians will reduce you to slavery. Your women and children will be butchered, as in times of old, and you will be slain—or will starve where now you live in plenty."

"I don't like that 'if' stuff," Hermes whispered into Teraf's ear. "The old boy should be more positive."

**AS** THOUGH he had heard the comment, Zeus lifted his sceptre, threw back his leonine head and shouted: "All those who have faith in me, join in our Song of Empire."

Then, as the Council burst into the rousing, space-haunted chant, the white-haired ruler led his phantom audience.

"Listen," whispered Athena.

Through the open windows the song echoed back at them, rolling in like a swelling wave as a million inhabitants of Atlan who had gathered before the

street corner vision screens joined in the refrain.

"The people are with us," the secretary of colonies murmured to Teraf. "Yesterday's raid, which killed hundreds of innocent bystanders, has enraged even the resident barbarians."

"Shall I tune off, sir?" inquired Apollo as the song ended and Zeus stepped away from the screen.

But as he spoke the oval was splashed with vicious colors which slowly coalesced. Hera screamed as a face became clear—the hawk-beaked, swarthy countenance of Plu Toh Ra.

"He's interfering on our wave-length from the Sais station," gasped Apollo; "I'll turn off the power."

"No," yelled Zeus. "Let him speak. Otherwise the people would think we were afraid."

"Slaves of Atlan!" The Egyptian's voice rang high and clear. "Pharaoh Plu Toh Ra, your liberator, speaks! How long will you toil like oxen so that this alien empire may grow? How long will you tolerate these wizards from another world who defile your gods and mock your sacred customs? Why must we send tribute back to Mars? Remember, we people of earth are entitled to all the fruits of earth. And remember that a land without gods is accursed."

"This is my warning," the voice roared on. "Rise at once and destroy your Martian oppressors. Rise! Or we shall destroy them and you with them. Not a living thing shall escape us; Plu Toh Ra has spoken!"

As the screen went blank Zeus stepped forward calmly.

"Titans! Barbarians! Martians!" he said. "You have heard the promises of one who calls himself your liberator. Which do you choose? Atlan or Egypt?"

Athena gripped Teraf's arm again. "That is our answer," she cried, her eyes shining with tears.

Once more through the windows came pouring the strains of the Imperial hymn, louder and with more fervor than before.



# THE SECOND SHIP



**By Jerome Bixby**

**"When you grow up, Danny, you're going to be a mighty important man on Mars." Danny couldn't know what the Prof meant by that remark now.**

**T**HE PROF—that's what I'd called him ever since I could remember—had rebuilt the radio set from what he could scrape together out of the wreckage of the *Mars I*, and the reception wasn't very good. But we could get Earth.

He used to sit by the table, looking out the window at the sandy slope that led from our cabin down to the desert floor and the blue canal beyond, and listen to the broadcasts from New York and London and the U.N. The boywire set got them all—the parts had been designed for inter-

planetary—but very dimly, and there was a lot of static sometimes.

It got the messages the Project Mars Foundation kept sending, too. Then his big hands would tighten on the edge of the table, and I knew he wished that somehow he could send a message back, telling them yes, the *Mars I* had crashed and that was why they'd never heard from it; and yes, there had been survivors...two survivors—the Prof and me. All the rest—colonists and scientists—killed, when the gyros failed in landing.

But our steam-turbine wouldn't gen-



erate enough power to let us transmit; attached to the ship's pile, it would have—but the Prof had dismounted it, heat transfer and all, with a wary Geiger on the pile...and anyway, we didn't have the radio working at that time.

"Sometime, Danny," the Prof would say, "they'll get around to sending another ship—if the Foundation can keep going, and get funds—the way the world is right now. Then we won't be all alone like this."

It was pretty terrible, the loneliness. The feeling of being the only two people on a whole planet. We had everything we needed, though—the turbine, a short-wave cooker, the radio, books, furniture...oh, just about everything—and we had the cabin, built out of curved plates from the ship. It had a funny shape, but it was airtight and strong; it had to be, what with the sandstorms that came every sunset. And we had a greenhouse going out back—peas, carrots, stringbeans, potatoes—and every day the Prof would go down to the canal and carry up water for our needs. For a while we had a pipeline running up; but the Prof decided we'd better save the turbine for things that only it could do.

Mars was lonely, and harsh, and somehow beautiful. Days, we'd work in the greenhouse, or at building the laboratory-shack up on top of the hill. The sky was a deep blue-violet, and you could see the brighter stars overhead, even at noon. Sometimes we'd explore—we found a broken-down canal-pump station, its big valves sixty feet above water-level now, and an old town, stone buildings half buried in sand, way out in one of the little oases that lay scattered along the horizon.

Every night after supper there'd be the lessons. The Prof would sit in his big chair in front of the fireplace, and ask me what I'd like to study tonight. He left it all up to me, because every day I would find something out in the desert or in the red hills—a bug or

a plant or a rock—that I wanted to know about. The books we had along one wall covered just about everything, and the Prof had a way of teaching that made me want to learn. Then there was the other reason for learning, that I came to understand: the Prof used to say, "Danny, you're practically a Martian, you know. It may be years before the other ship gets here, and by the time it does, I want you to know all you can about this planet. Its soil and its air; where what will grow and why; what can be made use of and what should be avoided. If I teach you geology and biology and chemistry now, you'll know more about Mars than anybody else—At least more than any one man could learn for a long time. Then, Danny, when they come, you'll be a mighty important man on Mars. A mighty important man."

**SO I LEARNED.** I learned about the plants and rocks, the fish-bugs from the banks of the canals, the bacteria in the water we drank. I learned about the weather of Mars and how to make it work for you, and about its soil properties, and what the seasons would kill and let live; and one day we cultivated a nine-inch beet in sand, lizard excrement and phosphates we fixed from the air. After that, our greenhouse vegetables weren't stunted any more.

Before, I mentioned two survivors—well, I should have said four, because two golden hamsters survived the crash. Mates. They are the Lord's dumbest creatures, but there's one thing they do well, and pretty soon we had more laboratory-animals than we could use (we turned some of them loose and they seemed to do all right); so I learned what animals were vectors for what diseases, Earthly and alien, and the life-cycles of the hosts, and how to deal with the diseases. Luckily, Mars didn't have many of its own to offer.

When we explored, it was usually with a purpose. Most of the water-



movement on Mars is underground, so there were a lot of caves, particularly back in the hills. That made coal comparatively easy to find—we located several narrow seams within a mile of the cabin, and charted some rich mineral lies within a not much larger radius.

We finished the laboratory on the hill. It had a microscope, and a port-glass Newtonian that could see miles in every direction, and a lot of equipment we'd jury-rigged from the remains of the ship's lab; we worked there a lot, weighing, analyzing, dissecting. Against one wall were my specimen-cases, filled with stones, insects and animals both dead and alive, cultures, plants and microscope slides; I knew each item inside out—biology, chemistry, habits and uses—before it went in there.

So, through the years, I came to know the planet Mars. Of course, the Prof learned everything right along with me—learned it first, really, before he taught it to me. But that

didn't matter much, he said.

"You see, Danny," he said one time, "I won't be around forever. I'm glad to learn all this—Mars is Paradise, for a man like me—but it's far more important that *you* learn it, so when the other ship arrives you'll be able to help them get started. Then you'll be a mighty important man, Danny...because they'll need you."

One day the Prof was fixing lunch and listening to the radio. I was reading. The static was pretty bad, but we both heard the broken, far-away voice say: "...second space-ship, the Mars II, left Earth today...the dangers of space in an attempt to... God smile on you..."

By the time the Prof had stopped laughing and crying enough to listen again, the voice was saying: "...fourth world war is...no compromise... Bomb..."

Even that didn't sober the Prof, he was so happy. But the next night, while we were sitting out in the greenhouse looking at the blue-green star



Was this the only solution to the problem of the outsiders?

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don't miss what we believe will be acclaimed  
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## THE SHINING CITY

by Rena M.  
Vale

We are proud to  
present it in the  
current issue of

**SCIENCE FICTION  
QUARTERLY**



of Earth, it flickered and swelled into a shaking white flame.

**WE** WAITED for the second ship.

We knew, from the messages it constantly sent, that the people aboard were planning to land at the same point the *Mars I* had announced it would try for—the south point of Syrtis—and that they were hoping to find survivors.

The Prof hardly slept at all. He just sat in his big chair that he'd pulled over by the window, and looked at the sky. Once, when he did sleep, huddled in the chair with his chin on his chest, he talked; "Oh dear Lord, if there's only just one. Just one, Lord. That's enough—"

Two weeks passed, and the second ship landed right by the canal; the airlock opened and men came out. They looked at the desert and the evening sky and the white flare that had been Earth. One of them saw our cabin, up on the hill, and shouted...but by that time we were down to greet them. I sort of lagged behind in the shadows—this was the moment the Prof had always talked about, but I wasn't very used to people.

The Prof quietly shook hands with the leader. "I'm Professor Hale."

"Ernest Loring, Professor."

"That's a—a rather small ship; are there any colonists with you?"

"No." He was short and grey-haired, and his voice was very deep, with a bitter sound. "Five old men. Scientists...volunteers. Eight started out. The young were all fighting, when..." He looked up at the flame in the sky, brighter than Phobos, then down again with a sigh. "That's the first time we've seen it. But we caught it in on our instruments, and we knew. Professor, are you—all?"

The Prof moved a hand, including me where I stood back in the shadows. "Yes. All."

They talked about the *Mars I* and Earth, while I stood silently, looking up at the shining ship. Three

more grey-haired men came out of the airlock. Then I heard the Prof's voice, "—sorriest for him—" and I saw him motion in my direction, and he looked very old and tired. The leader looked sharply toward the shadows where I stood, and I knew he hadn't read the Prof's gesture, that he hadn't seen me until now. I could see his face in the glow of the setting sun...first, there was surprise; then he closed his eyes tight, but that didn't stop two tears from rolling down his cheeks. He took the Prof by the shoulders and turned him around so that he faced the airlock.

Coming out of it were two people—maybe the last two, for there wasn't anybody behind them and the ship was dark now—a man and a little girl.

"His wife is dead," I heard the leader say, "and he didn't want to leave her behind in a world like that—"

"Like me," the Prof said, and his voice trembled so I could hardly hear it. "Like me." I saw that he was crying, and I wondered why. He walked over to me and put his hand on my head, while the scientists suddenly stopped talking and looked on, and the man with the little girl came forward with her.

"This is Mary," he said to me.

Awkwardly, I took her hand, and quickly dropped it. "Hello," I said.

"Hello," she said shyly.

The Prof said, his hand now on my shoulder as he looked around at the faces of the men, "It's like I said, Danny. When the second ship comes, they'll need you; we'll all need you. When you grow up, you're going to be a mighty important man on Mars, Danny. A mighty important man."

Now I know what he meant, but I didn't then. I felt very thrilled and happy, though, as each man came up and shook my hand. And a little bit like crying—except that there was a girl there.





# REALIZATION

A Vignette of Tomorrow, Complete On This Page

by Ben Singer

**J**UST ONE moment ago you were standing there—doing nothing. The memory of this lack of movement is vague, but somehow you know that *before* it happened, you were doing nothing. Absolutely nothing.

And then—

The screams of the multitudes, blended into one high-pitched wail—almost music-like in its continuity.

You walk through the streets and the ghosts of the multitudes do not speak.

*Clank, clank.*

But the memory of—was it consciousness?—all events prior to it—the memory of all was vague.

*Clank, clank.*

You stop for an instant and look around you. The buildings are standing as before; could you possibly be imagining it?

No, you realize that you are not imagining *this*, so you stop fooling yourself. You *know* it happened.

*Clank, clank.*

And then a memory, just a faint hint, tugs at your mind. *They* were working on something big when this stopped all they were attempting to accomplish. But why are they *they* in your mind?

Were they working on space-flight? Or a new sociological experiment? Could it have been some kind of medical research—cancer perhaps? No, you are certain it was none of these.... But why should you wonder?

*Clank, clank.*

You do wonder if there are any others, but you look at the destruction around you and you *know* there are no others. None in the world!

But why you?

*Clank, clank.*

What were they attempting to do that was so important the memory of it haunts your mind now?

*Clank, clank.*

What was that sound?

The sound!

*Clank, clank.*

Frantically now, you start your memory-track back a little further; you dig. They were working on electronic brains, weren't *they*, to be used for—

*Clank, clank.*

—robots!

You stop walking, and the clanking stops.

Silence.





## DOWN TO EARTH

A Department For Science-Fictionists

(continued from page 10)

trations were good—very good, as a matter of fact—especially the one on page 47, and also the "comic relief" on page 68. No comment on the cover; after all *some* people must have liked it.

In case you are interested in my ratings, here they are: (1) "Captain Barnes and the Law"; (2) "Go to the Ant"; (3) "Fountain of Death"; (4) "Devil's Cargo"; (5) "Beautiful, Beautiful, Beautiful!"

Here's hoping your next issue is half (or twice) as good.

Evelyn M. Catoe  
323 Powers Street  
New Brunswick, New Jersey

(It sounds as if you may have received a copy, or several copies, short on staples; this happens with any book, sometimes. If you have similar trouble again, just send your copy in, and we will replace it with a solidly-bound one.)

### MISSING—POIGNANCE

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Have just finished the March '52 issue, and would like to take this opportunity to comment upon it. As Mr. Hoskins' letter put it, I feel dissatisfied—but it is hard to pin the dissatisfaction down. Some of it, of course, is traceable to the stories, and I think that a part is also due to the way the illustrations take to ink...in a great many cases, they don't. For instance, I refer in particular to the illustration for "Fountain of Death"—it seems sort of sloppy; has a dashed-off look about it.

The cover is acceptable, this issue, though I agree with your comment that the titles on the cover should be smaller; and I feel that the lead story alone, should be spotted on the cover. Unless, of course, you should happen to have a short story by one of the better-known authors in the issue in question. As far as girly or non-girly covers go, my sole idea is this: the cover should be

pleasing, and I don't necessarily mean pleasing to the aesthete, or low-grade moron, to take the extremes: I mean pleasing to the average human being, who doesn't give a hoot whether it is "September Morn", or the schematic diagrams for UNICAC, as long as the eye is pleased. The cover on this issue was not as garish as some I've seen, and for that, congratulations. I would be pleased to have it kept that way.

The stories themselves ran all the way from terrible to middling-good; there wasn't one that I would care to add in hard covers, or one that I'll remember much beyond next week. However, in the main, they were diverting, and that is almost all you can ask...anything else is a dividend. It is seldom that an editor has a chance at a story like "Who Goes There?", or "Requiem", or "Far Centaurus". That's not your fault; stories like those are only written once. Which brings me to my main criticism.

In going to the ant, I also found myself going over very familiar ground. Herr Kubilius seems to have taken off on at least three well-worked themes: insect rule, flying saucers, and alien-menace-to-the-Earth. All the way through the story, I had the feeling, "I've read this before, somewhere..." Please don't misunderstand—I have no objection to the reworking of used themes, so long as they are *done well*. And to rewrite an old plot, and do it well enough to please a reader, is, by far, the most difficult of all writing assignments, in my estimation. Unfortunately, Kubilius didn't quite make it.

The lead novelet also suffered the same way. I can't pin it down, but I am sure I have read the same plot elsewhere, although perhaps not in science-fiction. Both you and Tom Wilson missed a great opportunity to come up with a very poignant scene, where Maisie dies. With a little more attention, she would have been a standout character in any yarn. It was pleasing, yes, but not only Maisie suffered from



lack of characterization; not one of them stood out, and Maisie was the only one who even came close. A great deal of suspense could have been built up with some work, and I'm truly sorry you and Tom Wilson missed the boat.

Lombino's yarn was the best in the issue, but there again the fault was characterization. The general was not sufficiently motivated in the beginning to make his sudden urge to bomb the machine plausible. As you state in your blurb, the time-machine story is not—as far as we know now—truly accurate, scientifically. But that doesn't matter as long as plot and characterization are plausible. The general wasn't, and neither was the girl, for the reason that she wasn't built up enough. A more minor point was that the yarn fell somewhat flat at the end, but a little judicious tinkering might have fixed that.

The rest of the stories ranged from fair to bad. The "Captain Barnes" story might be good for a series, if the captain's character, and that of the lawyer, are highlighted a little more. The ending was too obvious, however. "Beautiful, Beautiful, Beautiful"...the saddest words of tongue or pen, and so forth. It wasn't, but it might have been; the other story was almost worthless. Neither plausible nor well-written.

As for the departments, I liked the book reviews very much, and the letter-column was as varied and interesting as any I've ever read. I'm glad, very glad, that you have seen fit to keep out the active minority who feel that humoristic writing (quel phrase!) consists of misspellings, references to Saturnian "joola-joola juice" and like eternal juvenalia. One or two might raise a chuckle, but beyond that lies gastro-intestinal rejection, at least, as far as I'm concerned.

I'm glad that you apparently have the sense to state that *Future* is just a science-fiction magazine...not the best...not the only one that any sane human being would read...nor any other superlative and spurious comment. I also compliment you on trying your best to improve the magazine until you do rate a few superlatives. There is no stasis in life, and there should not be in the publishing business; one must either go ahead, or fall behind; and as long as you continue to do your best, you'll get my twenty cents, any time. There is little enough honesty anywhere in the world

today; let's, please, try to keep it in the written word.

Anthony K. Van Riper  
3673 East 4th Street  
Tucson, Arizona

(Maisie struck me as being a pathetic character, rather than a tragic one, and I agree with you that a "poignant death scene" could have been worked in—but I'm not sure it would have been good. It's all there by implication, and I found the cold statement of fact much more moving than a detailed description would have been. It reminds me of one of Oscar Wilde's well-known comments: "The death scene of Little Nell is enough to make a man with a heart of stone laugh.")

You say that the story has a somewhat familiar ring to it—of course; it's a crime tale, dealing with people essentially no different from those you read about in the papers, or see in the most authentic crime movies. Other science-fiction authors have handled it in different ways, but Wilson's point was that, outside of changes in the outer environment, it was the same kind of story you'd read in the latest issue of a good detective and mystery magazine.

It missed fire? This may be; I found it a compelling story, with a verisimilitude rare in science-fiction, but I could be mistaken.)

#### CHEERS FOR ORIGINALS

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

May I congratulate you on one of the wisest—and, I hope, one of the most popular—decisions of your career?

What I'm rejoicing about is, of course, your idea of passing out original illustrations. I'm in favor of it, and will be out gunning for an original regularly, from now on. It may not be a new idea, but it sure is a good one. After all, two bucks was just two bucks, but an original is something to treasure, and a jury of fellow-fans should be both critical and impartial.

The finest story in the March issue, despite its shortness, was "Beautiful, ditto, ditto!" Long live human nature, perversity, and sheer joyous nuttiness!

Only an exceedingly good story deserves a double blurb, and most readers will skip it, anyway. Sorry, but you asked us. The trouble with you, ed., is that you're frustrated for lack of a formal—or informal—editor's page. Why don't you get yourself one? Hope I don't further offend you by suggesting that you keep your letter-answers as short as possible. That last doesn't apply



to letters attacking you or your magazine.

Noticed some strange similarities between "Devil's Cargo" and a certain movie starring Richard Widmark and Paul Douglas, tracking down a pneumonic plague-carrier in New Orleans. Oh well, most of the story was original.

"Readin' and Writhin'" was well-planned and well-written.

I'd be glad if any Canadian fan who hasn't heard about the Canadian Science Fiction Association would drop me a line. That goes triply-tripled for Windsor fans; I've only found two of you boys.

Mark Johnston

433 Askin Blvd.

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

(Glad you liked the Friedman story, and am even more pleased to relate that it's been earmarked for a forthcoming anthology.)



## LAY THAT LOGIC DOWN!

Dear Ed:

Have just read your answer to the letter written by Morton D. Paley, and published in your March, 1952, issue. Pal, you are guilty of the same mistake that so many of us make; you have arrived at a conclusion, and then arranged your logic to support it. Your conclusion is that pulp magazines in general, and *Future*, in particular, should have girly covers. Your reasons: 1—The general sales-approach of pulp magazines is that of emotional appeal. (True, but do you have to follow the leader, like a sheep?) 2—Most buyers of magazines don't object to girly covers, or they would not buy the magazines. (But, man, where's your spirit of self-improvement?) If a buyer likes the stories, he'll continue to buy the magazine. (But I still contend that it will be in spite of the covers, not because of them. It's darn hard to get a magazine that doesn't have sexy covers.)

The fact of the matter is that, in the eyes of many fans, you are lowering the quality of your magazine by the covers. Not only are they unnecessarily sexy—they don't even illustrate the lead story. Your March cover illustrated an incident that the author didn't even think worthy of one paragraph.

Why shouldn't the covers illustrate the quality of the magazine? My opinion of *Future* isn't too high, but you're a better magazine than one would gather from your covers. It's obvious that your artists don't spend much time or care on them.

You assume that a magazine which doesn't have a girly cover will fail. One look at the extreme popularity of *Astounding Science Fiction*, and other magazines of the pocket-size variety, should prove the fallacy of this.

I don't, and Paley didn't, say that sex-appeal is beneath the dignity of science-fiction fans. We merely say that, as a selling-point, it is unnecessary. If it were necessary, most science-fiction wouldn't sell at all; this is an obvious fact.

By the way, Bob Hoskins' letter commented very aptly on your editorial policy. And I'll admit that that letter took care of one of my fears—that you wouldn't print unfavorable comments. Mr. Lowndes, please accept my hearty apologies for ever thinking such a thought.

In your answer to Bob's letter, you make two statements I'd like to question. 1—I didn't realize that you considered the pocket-size science-fiction magazines as out of the pulp class. 2—Even so, is there any reason why you could not pioneer in this cover matter? You might try for a few issues, and see whether your circulation goes up or down (I'd be willing to bet it goes up).

Y'know, I could criticize those covers from a purely artistic standpoint, too. In fact, the more I look at this one, the less I am inclined to judge it fairly. So I'll stop making comments on it, except to say that if anyone reading this doesn't agree with me, fire away! I'll be glad to hear from you.

Felice Perew, Office of the Cadet Adjutant,  
2860 Dartmouth Avenue, North  
St. Petersburg, Florida

(In most newsstands, magazines are bunched in various categories, and displayed as groups; thus, you will find the pulps in one sector, the "slicks" in another; pocket-books and pocket-sized magazines in still another, etc. Some potential buyers will look over the entire display; many merely look over their favorite section. Thus, while it is true that all magazines compete against each other, and all the science-fiction titles vie with each other, for the most part each pulp science-fiction title gets its main competition from the

[Turn To Page 90]



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This big 15" Silver Trophy  
on John Sill just did!



Your Name  
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**YES! John Sill**  
like millions, mailed me 10c and  
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# Let me Prove in 10 THIRILLING MINUTES A DAY I can make YOU An ALL-AMERICAN HE-MAN

**FAST—OR IT WON'T COST YOU A CENT**

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## Let me make YOU A WINNER IN EVERY WALK OF LIFE!



**YES! JOHN SILL'S SUCCESS STORY** can soon be your own success story. HOW A THIN WEAKLING WINS A TROPHY AS A MAGNIFICENT AMERICAN HE-MAN. A few weeks ago, John was a skinny weakling. Everybody picked on him. He had no punch, no guts to fight for his rights. TODAY everyone admires John's movie-star champion build—his mighty ARMS, his heroic CHEST, his rock-like TORSO, his broad BACK, his military SHOULDERS. His newly-born POPULARITY with fellows. The way GIRLS flock around him. His prowess on the ATHLETIC field. His double energy at work.

**NO!** I don't care how skinny or flabby you are; if you're 14 or 40, if you're short or tall, or what work you do. All I want is JUST 10 EXCITING MINUTES in your own home to MAKE YOU OVER by the SAME METHOD I turned myself from a wreck to a Champion of Champions.

Which of these 2 one-time WEAKLINGS  
PAID only a Few Cents  
to become an  
**All-Around HE-MAN?**  
Which One Paid Hundreds of Dollars?



Larry Campbell  
Rex Ferrus  
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other pulp titles. For the unconverted, this means—in effect—that *Future* is in competition with *Science Fiction Quarterly*, as well as the others, when both are on display at the same time.

The point of my discourse, in the March issue, was not to prove Mr. Paley *wrong*, or to prove our cover policy *right*, but to show that neither the one nor the other was *necessarily and absolutely correct*; and that, right or wrong, the policy *did* have some thought and logic behind it—it wasn't just a case of throwing girly covers onto our science-fiction books because the publisher likes pictures of pretty girls.

For the rest of your argument, let's wait and see how this Ross cover works out.)



### JUST A POOR MAN IN A FABLE

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

You seem to be placing yourself in the position of the poor man in the fable. It seems that this fellow was riding a small burro down the road, when he chanced to pass a group of idlers lounging in a doorway. One of these idlers remarked, "See how cruel that one is! Surely he should get off and lead the poor donkey."

The rider, wishing to be met with favor, immediately dismounted and trudged along, leading the habitually-dejected animal. Before long, it came to pass that he came upon another group of idlers, and one of them, feeling the need of comment, spoke up. "See the heartless fellow," he cried; "he should carry the poor, tired beast."

The stranger, still wishing to be looked upon with favor, at once heaved the struggling animal to his shoulders, and trudged off down the road. A short while later, his way led him by a third group of idle citizens, and, immediately upon seeing him, one of the group burst into raucous laughter. "Look at the foolish fellow," he chortled; "he should be riding the donkey!"

At this point, the weary stranger set the burro on its feet in the road, remounted, and went upon his way.

In this day and age, you cannot go wrong using girly covers on your magazine. You will not please everyone; but it goes without saying that you will please the greater number of prospective buyers. That opinion has been forced upon me by my own experience in operating a newsstand for a year. The magazines—regardless of interior content—that sold and repeated were the ones with flashy girls on

their covers. So much for that.

You ask for comment on the blurbs. It is enlightening to discover the editor's reasons for buying a particular story, but I would be of the opinion that a separate department be instituted for that purpose. Let the reader form his own unbiased opinion without cramming it down his throat. If the author has done his job, his story should be believable. Let him create his own set of facts and base his story accordingly. I believe that most readers of this kind of fiction are aware that it is anyone's guess as to what can take place farther on in time. Theories of today are not necessarily facts of tomorrow.

It seems to me that a lot of the men writing to you are overly concerned with the technical aspects of a given setting. I suggest that you refer them to scientific tomes on the issues involved. The vast majority of your readers are men like myself, who work hard at manual labor, and have no desire at the end of the day to try and relax with a magazine that makes them ponder mathematical formulae and involved technical discussions.

I have read several articles lately about the rise and fall and subsequent rise of the pulp industry as a whole. The pulp industry will never die out if its policy-makers hold the line. As long as hill-billy music and the Saturday night barn dance programs stay on the air, your customers are assured. For it is the same crowd of honest-to-gawd, down-to-earth American citizenry who patronize both. Television is fast becoming a standard piece of living-room furniture, to be looked upon with pride on occasion, but it cannot replace the magazine, or book, any more than radio can.

It is sound policy on your part to print contrasting stories. If you have one story in each issue that satisfies a given reader, you have a steady customer. To get his money's worth, he will read the rest of the stories; he will feel that they are an extra dividend. The one story which really suited him will have given him what he wants.

In the March issue of *Future*, you have only one story which I really became absorbed in; that story was "The Tinkerer". But the rest of the stories were of sufficient interest to hold my attention, and put me in a frame of mind which let me sym-

[Turn To Page 92]



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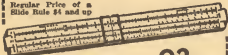
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### FUTURE Science Fiction

pathize with the author and allow him  
his patent faults. None of which are se-  
rious enough to warrant special comment.  
I bought a pulp magazine, expected pulp  
reading, got it. The deal is closed.

Frank D. Jameson

Gay Mills, Wisconsin

(I'd say that an issue containing one  
story which thoroughly pleases, and a bal-  
ance which holds interest for any given  
reader would represent the minimum aim  
for any magazine. But I cannot be delight-  
ed about it if the returns show that most  
of those who wrote in feel they received  
only their money's worth. What I'm after,  
it should go without saying, is to put to-  
gether issues which will make almost any  
given reader feel that he had gotten more  
than his money's worth, something better  
than he expected.)

### PRETTY FAIR JOB

Dear Sir:

I just finished your March number, in-  
cluding the letter column.

In the first place your magazine, as it is,  
seems to do a pretty fair job of giving en-  
tertainment, which, I believe, is about what  
the aim in publishing any fiction magazine  
is supposed to be.

I agree with many of your letter-writers  
that the covers are a bit on the lurid side,  
and that the general impression created by  
the magazine could likely be improved by  
toning them down a few shades. Loud,  
posterish covers, plus rather garish illustra-  
tions, combine quite often to give the im-  
pression of cheapness—which is not usu-  
ally carried out in the stories. These, in  
the main, are fairly well done.

Paper and printing are likely as good as  
the budget will stand. Quite probably, the  
paper will not stand the test of time very  
well, and assuredly—as you remarked in  
one of your comments—the art work does  
not reproduce too well on it. It is doubt-  
ful, though, that much better could be had  
on today's market, at a price which would  
allow you to compete with other magazines.  
Personally, I think that the stories are the  
thing. If the quality of the paper is good  
enough to allow a type-font of reasonable  
size to print clearly enough for easy read-  
ing, not much more should be asked.

Now about the stories in the March  
issue.

"Devil's Cargo", by Tom Wilson, left

[Turn To Page 94]



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## FUTURE Science Fiction

me slightly cold. Merely a gangster yarn transplanted to a future time and a strange setting. One thing, though: the writer did recognize something that I have often thought of—practically everybody would have one of the damndest cases of illness on record if he were to get far enough out into free space to escape the gravitational pull to which human beings have been subjected ever since the race came into being.

"Go to the Ant", by Walter Kubilius, was decidedly good. Not at all on the usual "space opera" formula; and a good, original twist on the "menace" theme.

"The Tinkerer", by S. A. Lombino, was rather cute. I imagine that this writer has, at some time, either been a member of the armed forces, or else has worked as a Civil Service employee. Anyhow, the depiction of the "brass" in this story, as a rather pig-headed group, reflects pretty well clearly the idea that most soldiers usually get of the top "brass".

"Captain Barnes and the Law", by Tarr Roman: obviously a pen-name. I wonder who Mr. "Roman" really is. Not at all a bad little yarn of the "theme" type. I wonder how many times Mr. Roman has been caught by laws that were made by absentees, from the comfort of an armchair.

"Fountain of Death", by Joseph Farrells just so-so. The theme of this yarn has been used almost ad nauseam, "Crime is always punished, even if the culprit escapes the arm of the law".

"Beautiful, Beautiful, Beautiful", by Stuart Friedman—obviously a tale of the "tongue-in-cheek" type. A rather cute satire at that. I wonder, if, perhaps, Mr. Friedman was thinking of our "friends" the USSR when he described the social conditions in this tale? As far as that goes, there is much truth in this little yarn for all societies, especially those of today.

David King

326 Lanc C, The Anchorage  
Clearfield, Utah

("Tarr Roman" is a pen-name, but not for one of the well-known scribes, and definitely not Kuttner. ...I think you'll start seeing some improvement in the reproduction of the artwork, now; it's being designed to "take" on our paper, and the results look promising, so far.)



## Unreasonable Facsimile

(continued from page 61)

had perfect balance, and it wouldn't harm seeing conditions.

There was too much to be done later.

Anya turned back into her dome, locked the seal firmly, then threw herself down on the cot. She couldn't cry—she'd lost the power to shake and make noises. And the tears were few. She vented her feelings in tight muscles that fought against each other, until her stomach was ready to burst.

"Cheer up, princess," Johnny's voice hit at her suddenly. "A few grey hairs aren't that bad."

He was inside the dome. Then she remembered that he'd have a key—he had to have a key to everything.

**S**HE PULLED herself up, putting the mask back on her face, and turning the needles that showed all discharge completed. "You can go back, John," she told him. "You're safe in the barracks now, playing your little military games."

He shook his head. "No more games, Two-Dots; you put an end to that—or didn't you know it?"

She swung around slowly. "You knew?" she asked, not quite believing that her ears had even heard his question.

"That the dome of force you're using would put an end to war in our world—of course I knew. Why do you think a bunch of us moved heaven and earth to get you up here, chicken? We knew that if you could do it, every city, town and hamlet could install one of these—that Earth would be attack-proof, from pole to pole, within a few years! They'll find the answer to the undetectable bomb—and a way to set the screen into action at the first threat. You can't have

[Turn Page]

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## FUTURE Science Fiction

war when you can't reach your enemy. Right?"

She nodded. It didn't make sense. Johnny had spent his life getting where he was—and now he was going to lose it. But he was telling her that's what he'd been trying to do.

"But the station here won't be abandoned, and neither will the work prove useless. Everything here can be switched over—because now, without the threat of war, we can turn our military men into space-men, and our budget into hitting the other planets. I've got the personal word of all the top brass on that—they hated war just as much as you did. Everybody wanted to use the money to reach Mars—everybody except the few who saw what we had, and wanted that first. And now we don't have to worry about them."

"And what about you, Johnny?"

He shrugged. "This will be the real school of space, then. And I'll be kidding young fools into thinking their fears are just a joke, and into trying to keep them from killing you, while you pound some sense into their heads. We'll make a great team, princess—now that we're equal."

She looked at the floor, wondering. He couldn't have meant what it sounded like. "Equal?"

"Both sterile—because I know what your precious field did to me. Two-Dots, do you think I haven't known all along—and haven't known we couldn't team up as long as you thought you'd be cheating me? I just never had the answer before. Now—well, we'll have plenty of kids—space-kids, ready to go out for us, boys and girls both."

Anya smiled slightly, trying to imagine how it would be to learn to smile properly. His grin reached back at her, until they were both beginning to chuckle.

Then she sobered. "Damn you, Johnny. We won't get anywhere if you can't show a little military spirit. You've got reports due in, young man!"





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# THE RECKONING

A Report on Your  
Votes and Comments

Friedman's little satire seems to have taken quite a beating, exactly one-third of the voters marking it for the red. Less than half, however, put it in last place, and some who did stated they enjoyed it. Otherwise — all the stories received roses and catcalls.

And the final scores go like this:

1. The Tinkerer (Lombino)	2.46
2. Go To The Ant (Kubilius)	3.00
3. Captain Barnes & the Law (Roman)	3.35
4. Devil's Cargo (Wilson)	3.89
5. Fountain of Death (Farrell)	4.05
6. Beautiful, Beautiful, Beautiful! (Friedman)	4.25

Originals, for the best-liked letters in "Down to Earth", go to Philip Brantingham, Morton Paley, and Ann Nelson, in that order. Please make your selections from the March, 1952, issue friends; Mr. Brantingham need make only one selection; Mr. Paley should make two, and Miss Nelson, three — in case first choice or second choice was taken by the others.

You're all invited to vote, both on stories and letters. Offhand, I'd say that your comments should reach me by May 15th, if you want them counted when the polls close.

Send your coupon to FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION c/o Columbia Publications, Inc., 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York.

★



Number these in order of your preference, to the left of numeral; if you thought any of them bad, mark an "X" besides your dislikes.

- 1. Because of the Stars (Dye) .....
- 2. Unreasonable Facsimile (del Rey) .....
- 3. They Shall Rise (West) .....
- 4. The Second Ship (Bixby) .....
- 5. Realization (Singer) .....

★

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- 2 .....
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General Comment .....



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C. L. M., Philadelphia, Pa.

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R. W. C., Cicero, Ill.  
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